

# DESIGNING FOR RACIAL HEALING AND PLANTATION FUTURES

by

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(Under the Direction of SUNGKYUNG LEE)

## ABSTRACT

Black labor and agricultural knowledge have been exploited as currency for America's first major economic system—the plantation. Drawing on geographer Katherine McKittrick's notion of plantation futures, the plantation's role in perpetuating Black loss and placelessness must be addressed in order to decolonize food-producing landscapes. Because America has centralized Blackness at the site of the plantation, this ethnographic landscape design study explores site-specific suggestions on Sapelo Island, Georgia that may support racial healing and (re)incorporate African diasporic food crops into a joyful, sustainable act of liberation from the plantation's carceral state. Seventeen months were spent immersed on the saltwater Geechee island during this mixed-method, landscape ethnographic design study. In addition to site-specific suggestions, this two-pronged project leans into its community-driven approach to offer a new design framework that designers and food activists may use for reimagining racialized landscapes that have been subjected to colonialism: monocultures, extraction, and Black invisibility.

INDEX WORDS: Sapelo Island, landscape architecture, design justice, food systems, diasporic crops, ethnographic design

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Healing [hee-ling]

**Adjective**

*Soothing, comforting, restoring*

**Noun**

*the process of becoming well (again) or growing sound*

***Transitive verb***

*To ease or relieve emotional distress*

*To mend*

***intransitive verb***

*To become free from injury or disease*

*To cause (an undesirable condition) to be overcome*

“They weren't just growing stuff—they were cultivating resistance.” Food

historian and chef Michael Twitty

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The visibility of former plantations still blatantly lingers across the American south and as a social institution, it reinforces racial constructs and the overly simplistic Black/white racial binary that subjugates being Black to subservience/invisibility and being white to visibility/power over land and people. Countless scholars such as Carolyn Finney, Ashante Reese, and Katherine McKittrick have communicated the relevancy of the plantation landscape in understanding the complexity of Black engagement and fugivity, “ongoing refusal to accept standards imposed elsewhere,” in spite of Black erasure and placelessness within public space (Garth and Reese 2020, 9). Collectively, they challenge the common use of deficit thinking that connects being Black to being void of a culture or sense of identity within public space. According to geographer McKittrick (2011), this racist mindset is still relevant because of the foundational constructs of race established by the plantation landscape. In 2020, landscape designer and Harvard professor Sara Zewde followed Frederick Law Olmstead’s *Cotton King* journey through the American south and found that while the physical conditions of the spaces (mostly cotton plantations) were no longer there, the social conditions of racial inequity were still there (BLAN 2021).

The Saltwater Geechee community of Hog Hammock in Sapelo Island, Georgia and the surrounding communities within the Gullah Geechee Heritage resist plantation-derived Black erasure through Black land ownership and everyday land practices such as growing Sapelo Red Peas. This pea is a cowpea cultivar that likely traveled from Sierra Leone during the transatlantic slave trade to Sapelo Island (Twitty 2017). The Hog Hammock community is also one of the last surviving Gullah Geechee communities so its unique coastal location holds rich place-based activities and crops of West African derivation.

This is an exploratory, ethnographic design thesis about racial healing possibilities through land and west African Diasporic foodways. Seventeen months were spent on Sapelo Island (Georgia) exploring how we, as the living descendents of enslaved Africans, can denounce Black erasure and preserve connectivity to the west African Diaspora by growing diasporic crops such as cowpeas, yams, and okra (Twitty 2017; Harris 2003).

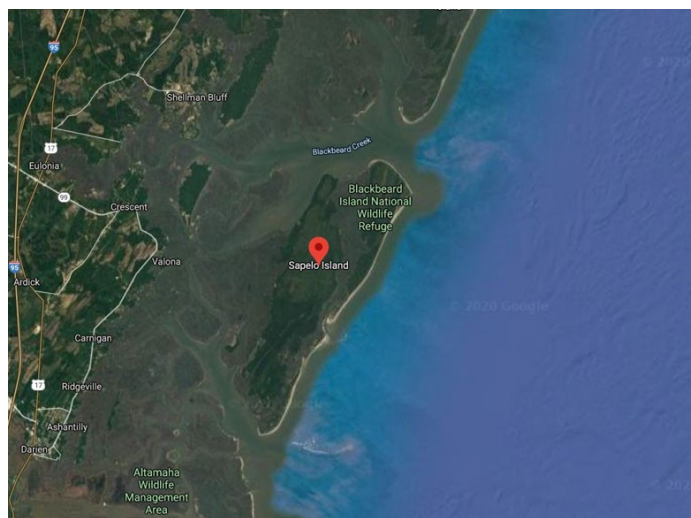


FIGURE 1.1: Context map of Sapelo Island. Sourced from Google Maps. Rendering edits by Whitney Barr.

Without a critical understanding of Black foodways and the plantation landscape, it becomes dangerously easy to perpetuate Black invisibility within design. Thus, there is no need

for designers to debate the existence of anti-Black racism within the built and natural environment. Instead, landscape designers can direct energy towards decolonizing the legacy of white supremacy in order to have what psychologist Anneliese Singh frames as part of *racial healing*. In fact, the time is urgent to find ways to use landscape design to shift beyond means of Black survival and to physically reimagine plantation futures as potential spaces of Black joy and/or liberation. For example, plantation landscapes were driven by colonial practices such as: crop monocultures, extraction of the land and body, and Black invisibility. Building on the work of Black food and geography scholars, these aforementioned colonial practices can be physically addressed and redressed by landscape architecture. This particular landscape design process, anchored by Singh's *Racial Healing Handbook*, entails loosening racism's grip on the plantation landscape.

Within the text, they include an iterative Racial Healing Wheel (Figure 1.2) of strategies that individuals and communities can use to “loosen racism's grip and to ultimately be able to challenge systems of racism more effectively” (Singh 2019, 8). Within this wheel, physically designing for plantation futures may offer space for four specific practices: Know Your Own Racial Identity, (Re)learn the History of Racism, Grieve and Name Racism, and Engage in Collective Racial Healing.



FIGURE 1.2: Dr. Anneliese Singh's Racial Healing Wheel. (Points of Light 2021).

While this study is specific to Sapelo Island, Georgia, the overarching research question driving this study is (how) can a physical design response to “plantation futures”, a term coined by geographer Katherine McKittrick, offer space for racial healing? This two-pronged project uses an ethnographic, community-driven approach to explore physical responses to plantation futures within a specific 2.33 acre site on-island, colloquially known as Lot 1, that was once part of the South End Plantation (Sullivan 1988; Sullivan and Gaddis 2014).



FIGURE 1.3 Sapelo's South End Plantation (yellow) that was mainly owned by Thomas Spalding. Original map 1940 map was drawn for Reynolds by R.N. White Jr and George R March. Map rendered by Whitney Barr.

Programmatic items and diasporic plant concepts will be suggested in collaboration with Geechee descendants of the present via semi-structured interviews and participatory observations. Ethnographic discussions with ancestral descendants were also analyzed through previously recorded interviews and texts written from the Geechee perspective. Focus group feedback from young Black activists about their racial healing journey through food and land will also help inform plantation future suggestions. In addition, this thesis hopes to offer a design framework that designers, particularly Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) designers, can use for reimagining anti-Black landscapes. Perhaps a new design framework can help designers focus on honoring a holistic narrative of the past and present, while also prioritizing

racial healing so that spaces can help honor the living legacy of Black foodways as a form of resistance to anti-Black landscapes.

“The plantation is a space that everybody runs from but nobody stops talking about.”

Author Toni Morrison

## **WHAT ABOUT RACE? HEALING THROUGH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

Throughout the landscape architecture discipline, healing has historically been romanticized without consideration for Blackness and land (Crook et al. 2003). Contrarily, Black women have advocated for and embraced healing through food and medicinal garden practices since pre-enslavement. A deep dive into healing landscapes through landscape architecture heavily involves settler-colonist language such as native-invasive vegetation and the inclusion of pollinator- friendly plants and sensory-driven features such as water and aromatic herbs, but it is rare to discover landscape architecture projects focused on healing explicitly for and with Black people. For example, they largely fail to position healing gardens as a physical response to racial trauma or to even include culturally diverse, African diasporic herbal plants within the landscapes. Many of these healing gardens also anticipate Eurocentric activities of solitude and strolling through an aesthetically pleasing experience void of socio-political context.

Within the larger realm of conventional landscape design approaches, if Black people are somehow mentioned, there is quite often a failure to explicitly address this lack of “social consciousness” (Brown and Jennings 2003). Decolonization for researchers involves a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values, which inform research practices (Smith 1999, 21 Decolonizing Methodologies) and I firmly believe that the underlying has been left largely unaddressed by largely-white disciplines, such as landscape architecture, that propose colorblind futures of the natural and built environment. This void

within landscape design education, racial healing, and the role of seemingly harmless plantation landscapes have not been seriously considered. In other nostalgic landscape design efforts, Indigenous peoples' land practices and culturally relevant plants such as Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) have been extracted and imposed into healing design for mainly white spaces without a thought of cultural genocide. There are award-winning healing gardens that have focused on connecting people with the healing and biophilic properties of the outdoors, but what happens when the outdoor space, in this case, the plantation, serves as a reminder of the colonial systems that have sought to diminish your value as a human being and to dismiss your agricultural expertise? In bell hooks' book, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-recover*, she addresses the adverse effects on the psychological health of Black people due to inaccessibility of land. She writes, "Without the space to grow food, to commune with nature, or to mediate the starkness of poverty with the splendor of nature, black people experience profound depression" (Hooks 1993, 179).

Largely, the plantation is often described in a *Gone with the Wind* manner of a nostalgic and romanticized south baked in white power. Meanwhile, countless landscape design projects have focused on the ecological restoration of the plantation landscape without addressing its anti-Blackness or the white obsession to preserve these landscapes. During my own design education, we have never addressed the role of the plantation in perpetuating Black loss, subservience, and placelessness (McKittrick 2011, 947). The plantation is discussed through a de facto approach and though the devaluing of Black lives through enslavement is mildly acknowledged, there is still ample opportunity for the landscape architecture field to use its skills to loosen racism's grip on former plantations and create futures that celebrate Black people and protect Geechee foodways.

## BLACK LANDSCAPES MATTER

Landscape architecture professor Kofi Boone, inspired by the mission of the present-day Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, urges this extremely white design discipline to acknowledge that Black Landscapes Matter and he begins his article with America's most common (mis)understanding of Blackness-the (Middleton Place) plantation.

The BLM movement was launched by Black women Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in 2013 after the hateful death of Trayvon Martin. The Black Lives Matter organization advocates for the protection of Black people in public and private space and the eradication of plantation remnants: Black devaluation and white surveillance. During one of the summer 2020 protests, organizers reclaimed a fenced in space for growing food for Black and Indigenous Folks and their allies. This temporary edible landscape reflects the ongoing need for safe growing spaces for BIPOC people, even whilst fighting for others to truly acknowledge that Black lives do in fact matter.



FIGURE 1.4: Black Lives Matter Resistance Garden. Source unknown.

This thesis operates under the assumption that because of the anti-Black structure of America's foundational (plantation) landscape, Black people are still forced to advocate for themselves within the built and natural environment. This struggle has been ongoing and upheld by the plantation landscape and present-day anti-Black violence.

Nonetheless, Indigenous and Black communities, such as the Hog Hammock community of Sapelo, continue to turn to diasporic foodways as a form of resistance, sustenance, cultural preservation, and joy.

Building on Kyle Brown and Todd Jennings' social consciousness conceptual framework (2003), landscape design education has largely opted out of addressing this complex and highly relevant landscape, yet many practitioners and design educators blindly hope for inclusive spaces. Community designers and planners have led the discipline for over 60 years in identifying engagement strategies that work towards equity, community empowerment, and environmental justice (Melcher 2013), yet, in the research of this thesis, no landscape design projects intersecting Black foodways and plantation futures as a means of anti-racist social justice were found. As mentioned previously, Black organizers and growers have been physically responding via diasporic plant selection and seed saving, but the presence of landscape designers in this activist context is murky. And even in the most well-intended community design initiatives, Black designers are still the minority. In the face of a declining Black landscape architecture student population that represents just 1% of graduating landscape architecture students (American Society of Landscape Architects 2019), the discipline must reconsider how and why we teach the next generation about our profession [and anti-racist] design ("Kofi Boone | University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability" n.d.).

In 2020 forward of *Black Landscapes Matter* (Hood and Tada 2020), Walter Hood asks if “these memories are too heavy for America to bear” and this thesis asserts that the heaviness of the carceral site, the plantation, must be redressed rather than erased or avoided. The heaviness lies in a redistribution of power and an acknowledgement of racism (Singh 2019). Furthermore, landscape architecture’s distance to Black landscapes, such as the plantation, can no longer be avoided due to its perceived heaviness.

Simultaneously, designers invest money and time in maintaining plantation landscapes, validating the late author Toni Morrison’s aforementioned quote about the familiarity of plantations without the racial healing practice of naming and grieving its racist positionality (Singh 2019). It is a persistent, but ugly blueprint of America’s present spatial organization, so what does it hold it a new future? This question continues to challenge me as a researcher and designer in the making who has personally seen white nostalgia repeatedly satisfied by a visit to Sapelo Island’s lush marsh, remaining “Big House”, and romantic Spanish moss today. There is an obsessively nostalgic recollection of the old south that reaffirms white power and continues to pervade our designs inside and outside of the studio.

## **A PLANTATION FUTURE? GULLAH GEECHEE CULTURAL INTERPRETIVE VILLAGE**

Additionally, what can plantation futures share about Geechee culture and its foodways? A 2008 Gullah Geechee Cultural Interpretive Village (estimated cost of \$6M) design on this thesis’s site of study, Lot 1, proposed a tourist-driven replica of slave houses, plantation homes, and cash crops (Lotson 2008; “Cultural Interpretive Village - Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS)” n.d.). Through this static design of the past, Black life seems

to only be valued through its tangible contributions to the plantation rather than paying homage to past, present, and future forms of Black agricultural resistance (White 2019).



FIGURE 1.5: 2008 Plan view of Sapelo's Cultural Interpretive Village design. From Cultural Interpretive Village Feasibility Study by Griffin Lotson.

#### Educational theater



FIGURE 1.6: Proposed Educational Theater. From Cultural Interpretive Village Feasibility Study by Griffin Lotson.

Slave houses



FIGURE 1.7: Proposed “Slave houses.” From Cultural Interpretive Village Feasibility

Study by Griffin Lotson.

Bridge over Africa at the Cultural Interpretive Village site to honor our ancestors from Africa as Slaves to Sapelo Island, Georgia



FIGURE 1.8: Proposed bridge to Africa. From Cultural Interpretive Village Feasibility Study by Griffin Lotson.



FIGURE 1.9: Cultural outhouses of the 18th and 19th century located on the island. From Cultural Interpretive Village Feasibility Study by Griffin Lotson.



FIGURE 1.10: November 2020 Drone Shot of Lot 1 (same location of Cultural Interpretive Village). Sourced from Dr. Nik Heynen (drone flyer unknown) .

When colorblind design and its curriculum freeze Blackness to struggle or connotes Black to poor or urban or pro bono projects, it is difficult to reimagine the plantation as a space of radical Black joy that resists oppression and embraces (definitions of) healing: the process of becoming well (again), to cause (an undesirable condition) to be overcome (“Definition of HEAL” n.d.). But for those of us who descend from colonized communities, “we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity” (Smith 2012, 25).

### **EXTRACTION AND THE PLANTATION**

For Black people, the heaviness of the plantation continues to show itself in spaces that reify racial-colonial constructs such as policing in public spaces (Austin Allen 1996), private spaces of rest (Breonna Taylor), and in educational spaces, such as the design studio, where the abysmal percentage of Black students challenges a “Black sense of place” (McKittrick 2011, 948). The largely white field of landscape architecture has not acknowledged how triggering the plantation and/or public space may be for Black design students nor have students been challenged to reimagine oppressive spaces through the eyes of the oppressed as future sites of resistance.

Geographer Katherine McKittrick reminds us that plantations historically militarized Blackness and have subjected us to a collective trauma regarding land. In order to heal from this violent landscape, we need to be able to reclaim our whole selves as well as agricultural practices and economic wellbeing. Geographers, Black feminists, anthropologists, and other Black scholars have wrestled with the impact and future of these spaces, so why hasn’t our field (landscape architecture) allocated time and resources to visualizing futures that honor and

celebrate Blackness and its diasporic connections to land? Because America has centralized Blackness at the site of the plantation, the racial healing framework (Singh 2019) should include place-based suggestions-driven, in part, by landscape designers. How can we help spatialize plantation futures of food sovereignty as a form of Black resistance? Unpacking this trauma is complex and cannot be solved through design alone and certainly not through this specific landscape design project. But, this is an intentional start.

### **TRAUMA AND HEALING THROUGH THE LAND**

Black labor and agricultural knowledge were exploited as currency for America's first major economic system-- the plantation. This exploitative act of over 200 years of enslaved labor and ongoing years of unfair wages continue to exacerbate the racial income inequality gap. Many Black people left after the Civil War, Great Migration, and, in the present day, they continue to leave coastal areas of socio-ecological vulnerability (sea-level rise and coastal development) for seemingly more affordable and promising futures in urban and suburban spaces. But many, like the Saltwater Geechee people of Sapelo Island, have stayed and held onto their land. Despite white supremacy's efforts to displace Black people from land via enslavement, sharecropping, segregation, land grabbing, and plantation derived- large scale -agriculture, Black women such as the late Saltwater Geechee descendant Mrs. Cornelia Walker Bailey, Freedom Farmer Fannie Lou Hamer, and Soul Fire Farm's Leah Penniman have vividly demonstrated the living African Diasporic relationships to land through our foodways. These women were/are designers for and with Black communities and their legacy should help inform future, racially inclusive healing landscapes--especially those with a food focus.

Before passing away in 2017, Mrs. Cornelia Walker Bailey spent time developing partnerships with the University of Georgia and Clemson University in order to preserve Sapelo

red peas, indigo, and purple ribbon sugarcane that once grown on the island. While no longer here to interview, her memoir, various recordings, and conversations with her son, have helped greatly inspire the food-focused approach of this thesis. In her words, “I want there to always be community here” so this is an attempt to honor that wish.

In sociologist Dr. Josephine A. Beoku-Betts’s 1995 article, “We Got Our Own Way of Cooking: Women, Food, and Preservation through Cultural Identity”, it is evident that Gullah Geechee culture is grounded in food and the place-based activities where land meets water.

Rather than paraphrasing, below is a direct quote from a Geechee descendant:

**You’ve got to have culture in order to make your community stable and stay in one place. And so how else can white people come in and say, “Oh, these people down here speak Gullah or Geechee,” and want to learn more about your culture, but at the same time they want to buy your land and push you out. How can you come down and visit me in my area, but I’m hanging on by a thread because you want my area. What do you suppose they’ll show their friends and talk about? You know, they’ll say, “This used to be a Gullah community, a Geechee community, but now they all live there in the heart of Atlanta or someplace else.” It’s not going to work. You can’t move papa from [here], sit him in the middle of Atlanta, and say, “Make your cast net.” Who’s he going to sell cast net to in the middle of Atlanta? . . . all of a sudden he’ll die. So you can’t move the culture and tradition from one area and just plant it in another area. . . . You’ve got to nurture it here, pass it down, teach children, and so forth. It’s a slow process. You’ve got to know how to do it and you can teach other people how to do it. (Velma Moore, 1991)**

FIGURE 1.11: Geechee excerpt on place-based culture (Beoku-Betts 1995).

This close human-nature environment can still be experienced on Sapelo Island within its Geechee community. Throughout the course of this thesis experience, Sapelo residents often described how plentiful food and crop production once was on island before the various Geechee communities: Hog Hammock, Raccoon Bluff, Shell Hammock, Belle Marsh and Lumber Landing were forcefully consolidated by white colonizers into the only one that stands today, Hog Hammock.

On an archived Georgia Coast website, Mrs. Bailey stated:

*It's a dying form of life we have here. In some ways I relish the new way while at the same time I feel such a heavy loss for the vanishing of the old ways.*

While there is no way to replicate the past, physical design does allow for people to participate in a collective memory of the past as described by the late Mrs. Bailey and other Geechee descendants during this thesis process. Additionally, confining a landscape to only be a reflection of the past or to only grow crops may not be enough to engage intergenerational use of the site. In order to mitigate scope creep, this thesis prioritizes diasporic plants and crops and surrounding (social) programmatic features related to the site's sustainability as a racial healing landscape.

## **OVERVIEW OF ISLAND AND DIASPORIC CROP LANDSCAPE**

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Sapelo Island is a coastal barrier island near the port of Darien, Georgia about 45 miles (72 km) south of Savannah and is only accessible via ferry or personal boat. In 2004, the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the Gullah-Geechee Corridor on its list of most threatened places. This Georgia barrier island (11 miles long and 3 miles wide) is threatened by rising sea level and cultural erasure largely due to rising developmental pressure (Hardy 2017). Currently, 97% of the island is owned by the state of Georgia and the remaining 3% is owned by roughly 40 Saltwater Geechee descendants (mostly seniors) and an increasing number of white second home owners. A handful of UGA employees also live on the island. The Saltwater Geechee people of Sapelo comprise one of the largest remaining Geechee communities and they largely descend from Sierra Leone and Barbados by way of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Since the island was “purchased” from the Yamacree Creek Indians by the British Crown in 1733, Sapelo Island has passed through the hands of various white men. Three are of particular note: plantation owner Thomas Spalding, who enslaved 385 West Africans for 62 years; automotive industrialist Howard Coffin, who ran several commercial agricultural operations on-island; and tobacco magnate R.J. Reynolds, who lived on the island part-time and funded the University of Georgia’s Marine Institute (UGAMI) (Georgia Writers’ Project 1986; Sullivan 1988).

But it was the freed descendants, originating from enslaved West Africans who were first brought here in 1802, who have maintained the only continuous community on the island, despite a series of challenges that continue today (“Hog Hammock: Grounds for Democracy: Landslide 2018 (TCLF)” n.d.). During the 1960s, a series of broken promises, land swaps, and systemic oppression led to the forced consolidation of the entire Geechee community on Sapelo into the 434-acre Hog Hammock (C. Bailey 2001). While Hog Hammock used to be home to over 600 people and 44 families, only 7 families remain today and they continue to self-advocate for land ownership and cultural sovereignty. In response to these ongoing cultural threats, Cornelia Walker Bailey, author and instrumental community leader, helped found the Sapelo Island Culture and Revitalization Center (SICARS) with other Geechee descendants in 1993.

It should also be noted that UGA’s presence on island has been criticized for not hiring, educating, or supporting the needs of the Geechee community. Walker expressed to UGA Professor Dr. Nik Heynen, that the “University had come to her island and taken, taken, and not given anything back” (Heynen 2021, 96). In 2017, Heynen sought out to formally respond to white extraction and to address the need for Geechee cultural preservation and economic development through the launch of the UGA Cornelia Walker Bailey Program on Land

Agriculture (UGA CWB). Under a model of community-based social science, the program seeks to honor the goals of the late matriarch and to use “liberation farming” as a way of honoring ancestral agricultural practices (M. Bailey and Heynen 2020). The intent of these selected sites is to return economic development to the island through the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS). The selected site for this specific thesis will be referred to as “Lot 1” and is sized at 22 acres with 1.06 acres currently cultivated within a fenced area of 2.33 acres.

This site of liberation farming is referenced as heritage crop landscapes referenced within this thesis are legally claimed by the Georgia Heritage Authority, managed by Bailey’s son, Maurice Bailey, with the support of UGA grant funding and volunteers under the direction of UGA professor and co-director Dr. Nik Heynen. Below is a Google image of the site next to First African Baptist Church (Figure 1.10), site context imagery (Figure 1.11 and Figure 1.12), July 2019 image of red peas growing at the site (Figure 1.13), and an October 2019 view of sugar cane (Figure 1.14 and Figure 1.15).



FIGURE 1.10: Aerial view of Lot 1. From Google Earth.



FIGURE 1.11: Site Context. From Google Earth.

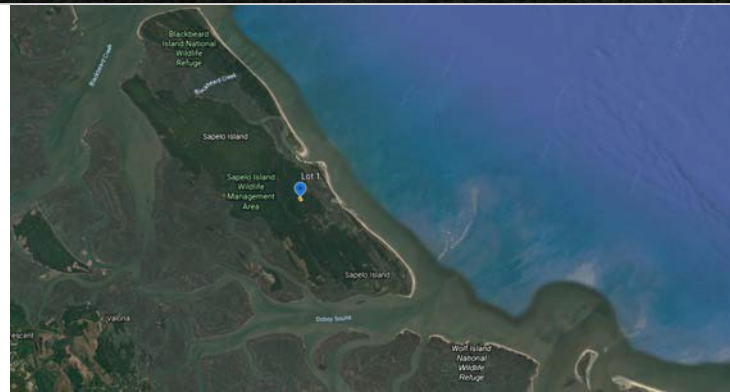


FIGURE 1.12: Site Context to coast. From Google Earth.



FIGURE 1.13: Sapelo red peas growing at Lot 1 (facing north).  
Photo taken by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 1.14: Lot 1 during an October sugarcane harvest (facing northwest).  
Photo taken by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 1.15: Purple ribbon sugarcane.

Photo taken by Whitney Barr.

The site also sits next to the home of the island’s Culture Day that was once held annually by SICARS until the destruction of Hurricane Matthew. Culture Day invites descendants and the larger public back to celebrate Sapelo Island. For these reasons, there is a strong (thesis) interest in designing this site in a way that can both preserve this heritage food crop landscape and the rich culture that it represents to the people of Sapelo. Without socio-ecological preservation of these landscapes, it becomes much more difficult to preserve the crops. The know-how of growing, harvesting, and cooking these crops comes from storytelling, oral recollections, and watching elders in the community. Without a site to do so, these Geechee food practices will become more and more faint. And if the privileged field of landscape architecture and designers at large continue to enact an “uncritical consumption” of plantation landscapes, Black, place-based cultural erasure is at high risk (Smith 2012, 25).

## OVERALL OBJECTIVES

The proposed landscape design scenarios specifically aim to honor the legacy of Black enviro-relationships around foodways, especially amongst the Saltwater Geechee people of Sapelo Island, Georgia. Rather than normalizing the absence of Blackness or accepting Black foodways as a simple commodity, **this thesis will wrestle with the possibility of healing at and through diasporic crops at the site of the crime-the plantation. This ethnographic thesis will offer some conceptual scenarios of racial healing that are driven by community response to specific diasporic crops, plantations, future land use, and land ownership.** Throughout this thesis process, I will share my exploratory design methods transparently and work towards a design framework that may be implemented into studio environments that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As a farmer, southern cis-gendered Black woman, and a researcher, I came into this landscape architecture program in order to address this challenge and to see if design, particularly around how we engage with our diasporic foodways, could help us begin to heal from the initial site of Black incarceration in this country- the plantation. This is not the beginning of our history as Black people, but it is a site of Black loss that continues to inform our discipline and public space. Perhaps if a public space was designed by us and addressed the historical trauma and resilience, then maybe we can find peace to authentically show up and engage in these spaces.

These iterative scenarios will be shared with the Saltwater Geechee descendants of Sapelo in hopes that they may contribute to the cultural resilience of the island. Due to the coastal vulnerability of the island, these scenarios may need to be implemented or moved to in other diasporic communities on the mainland.

**Chapter two** reflects on racial healing examples of **(re)learning** diasporic vegetation,

**unlearning** plantation-derived racism, **reflecting** on Black relationships with agriculture, and **nourishing** Black wealth and wellbeing. This chapter combines literature review findings and selects case studies in order to support future thesis design approaches related to racial healing and diasporic crop preservation at Lot 1.

**Chapter three** highlights the methodical process of this decolonized, ethnographic design approach and unpacks specific design intentions driven by the Hog Hammock community and visiting Black land activists. This transdisciplinary qualitative study utilized mixed methods of behavioral observational studies, personal reflections, semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and mapping/participatory design methods for data collection. Photography and taxonomic action and value coding results from the seventeen months spent working and living on Sapelo Island will also be included.

**Chapter four** focuses on site specific design scenarios. This framework intendsto offer specific actions for designers. Finally, **chapter five** will offer a **concluding reflection** of this thesis experience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Chapter two reflects on racial healing examples of **(re)learning** diasporic vegetation, **unlearning** plantation-derived racism, **reflecting** on Black relationships with agriculture, and **nourishing** Black wealth and wellbeing. This chapter combines literature review findings and selects case studies in order to support future thesis design approaches related to racial healing and diasporic crop preservation at Lot 1.

#### HEALING THROUGH (RE)LEARNING DIASPORIC VEGETATION

Rare, Geechee-centered texts, *God, Dr. Buzzard and Mr. Bolito Man* and *Sapelo Voices*, helped to heavily inform the future planting design scenarios. Bailey's text and the Geechee interviews of Ray Crook's *Sapelo Voices* that she co-facilitated prove that Geechee descendants have a history of growing diasporic crops as a form of resistance against the plantation system. Bailey lets readers in on her personal and Saltwater Geechee relationships with growing, preparing, and storing crops before a ferry became available to Geechee descendants. Throughout acts of racist land displacement and racial tension on the island, descendants continued to embrace their food and culture.

Both texts unveil the Geechee truths of plants that are no longer grown, harvested or commonly eaten today, yet still meaningful to the larger African Diasporic culture and understanding of Black relationships with land. Her detailed accounts of specific herbs that

women foraged and brewed into teas and tinctures to use while pregnant demonstrate that these medicinal herbs were not just interesting for their botanical value. They symbolize the historic resistance of Black women and their ongoing agency of personal and collective health within anti-Black landscapes such as the plantation and segregation. Black women on Sapelo have engaged with plants in order to protect their Black bodies and to survive in anti-Black racist landscapes, such as the plantation. The plantation landscape thrived by



deliberately undermining the health of Black women's bodies.

FIGURE 2.1: Mrs. Cornelia Walker Bailey in an open field holding Life Everlasting (and other herbs) in hand. Rendered by Whitney Barr. Source: Vanishing Georgia.



FIGURE 2.2: Sapelo residents Yvonne Grovner and LaShundra Bailey with unfinished sweetgrass (made with muhly grass) baskets in hand (Vanishing Georgia).



FIGURE 2.3: Black woman pounding rice on Sapelo Island (Vanishing Georgia).

Naming, knowing, and planting these diasporic plants is key to humanizing Black experiences that have always been in existence, whether it be next to or outside of the monoculture conditions of the plantation landscape. Without access to these crops in future landscapes, it is likely that this history will be overshadowed by white memories of plantation ruins that have failed to adequately address lived Black experiences and diasporic contributions to the foundation of American cuisine. When this happens, Black geographies become more and more imaginary as if Blackness is placeless (McKittrick).



FIGURE 2.4: Ruins from the Chocolat Plantation. Images like this are commonly used in plantation scholarship and void of Black existence (Vanishing Georgia).

### **SLOW AFRO-INDIGENOUS PRACTICES AND PLANT POSSIBILITIES**

Farms such as Soul Fire Farm of New York and Morning Glory Homestead (St. Helena, SC), invite Black and Brown communities to (re)learn about our foodways through their 80+ plants, racial justice trainings, and onsite programming such as planting

rituals and campfire activities. In the wake of hyper visible structural racism, Soul Fire Farm and Morning Glory have both seen an increased interest in visitors and digital engagement around topics of food, agriculture, and race. While it can be tempting to lean into plantation economics and design quickly for high cash crop yields, their agroecological practices demonstrate examples of Black-owned farms who value biodiverse agricultural practices and sharing in BIPOC-focused communal experiences.

### **PLANT INSPIRATION FROM *FARMING WHILE BLACK***

In *Farming While Black*, author Leah Penniman offers examples of diasporic crops such as Caribbean scotch bonnet pepper and its Nigerian name, *ata rodo*. Since there is an interest in growing peppers for hot sauce production within Lot 1, this crop for example could be included alongside Zanzibar's Mboga pepper and the indigenous fish pepper *Capsicum anuum*. Penniman's text also provides an extensive list of diverse cowpeas with West African origin. Sorghum is widely used in West Africa and often interplanted with okra. The versatile use of sorghum as a perennial can also be incorporated into Lot 1's design. Penniman refers to diasporic herbs as plant medicine and acknowledges their integral uses throughout Africa and helped care for our ancestors while subjected to both Caribbean and American plantation systems. For example, enslaved Africans often used *Asafoetida* and basil for respiratory related illnesses. On the plantation, *Asafoetida* may have been used to ward off negative energy and today in Louisiana's Voodoo culture, it is also used by Black locals to symbolically keep away the police. Ashwagandha has also been used by people across Africa, India, and the Middle East as a powerful adaptogen and stress reliever.



FIGURE 2.5: Soul Fire team building *jardin lakous*, an intensive micro-farm of Haitian origin, with perennial, pest-detering, pollinator-attracting herbs such as chives, sage, lemon balm, basil, and echinacea surrounding young apple trees. The trees are the center points and animals hang around the shaded areas. In turn, their manure helps with the surrounding herbal growth. Sourced from Soul Fire Farm website.



FIGURE 2.6: Pre-planting ritual with ancestors at Soul Fire Farm. Sourced from Soul Fire Farm website.



FIGURE 2.7: Woman braiding cowpea into hair in order to save seeds during transatlantic slave trade. Source Farming While Black:



FIGURE 2.8: Community circle with perennial herb edging at Soul Fire Farm. Sourced from Soul Fire Farm website.



FIGURE 2.9: Aerial View of Soul Fire Farm from website. While helpful for site context, aerial plans are not an effective medium for communicating racial healing through food.

## ADAPTABILITY CONCERNS AND SITE INSPIRATION

Since this farm is located in upstate New York with an extremely different climate, sloped topography, and soil type, some of the suggestions will need to be modified for usage on Sapelo. Also, the selected crop and herbs should hold value to the Geechee people of Sapelo and help *place-keep* while also leaving future room for some “new” diasporic growth by and for Black youth, descendants off island, and outside supporters of this particular site. This project wrestles with different plant scenarios that prioritize cultural value, ecological resilience, and profitability. If selected plants lack connection to

the Geechee people of Sapelo, this will not support racial healing and maintenance issues are likely to arise. These plants also have to be able to withstand extreme storm events, heat, and also tolerate a degree of salinity within a sandy soil. Since Sapelo's population is only ~40 total and aging, site maintenance capacities will not be able to meet the staffing at Soul Fire Farm. Thus, planting low-maintenance perennials (as recommended by Soul Fire Farm) in raised beds may be a feasible design suggestion.

Though Soul Fire Farm offers a robust list of plants, there does not seem to be any shared conceptual planting plans or crop budgets that other farmers, activists, and designers can use as a model on other sites. And while a lot of the racial healing work is related to growing and cultivating, wealth building is necessary for racialized landscapes such as Sapelo Island to survive. Without the physical presence of these landscapes, certain place-based practices such as growing Sapelo red peas and life everlasting may become erased from our memory. Hopefully through this design process, we can reclaim these memories by relearning and regrowing the plant material.

### **HEALING THROUGH UNLEARNING PLANTATION-DRIVEN RACISM**

Middleton Place (Charleston, SC), and Morning Glory Homestead Farm (St. Helena Island) are just two examples of organizations that have rejected the plantation system's permanency and reshaped their landscapes to guide visitors through an unlearning of land and plantations as white-only spaces (Finney 2014). These sites help visitors unlearn normative whiteness by making Black environmental relationships visible within their landscapes. While Soul Fire Farm decolonizes the idea that Black relationships with land began with slavery, Middleton Place helps unpack specific everyday Black experiences on the plantation. Morning Glory, a 12.4 acre Geechee family-owned farm, uses agritourism and its convenient access to

Hunting Island State Park to explore old and new Black environmental practices.

Middleton Place, is a 65 acre site of a (former) 63,000 acre plantation in Dorchester County, near Charleston, South Carolina. Beginning in 1971, Middleton Place became one of few plantations to share the 187 years of historical and forced contributions of 3,500 enslaved Africans who once maintained 19 plantations over 63,000 acres of stolen Middleton land, equivalent to 63,000 football fields or 98 sq. miles. Enslaved Africans were strategically captured from various countries along the Ivory Coast for specific skills and agricultural expertise such as rice growing and carpentry.



FIGURE 2.10 : Location of the Transatlantic slave trade (van Anedel et al. 2014).

## DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE WHITE GAZE

While the population of free labor engaged within this space 3,500 enslaved Africans may alarm some, this short account of a plantation has largely been accepted as palatable because of the “nature” of the times. But Middleton Place challenges this racist narrative through an unlearning of Blackness as a submissive culture-less monolith. Most recently, the former plantation produced a documentary focused on unlearning, entitled

*Beyond the Fields* (2017). This documentary includes renowned Gullah Geechee artist Jonathan Greene who has famously visualized Geechee culture through his use of vivid acrylic on canvas. In the film, he shares that “that’s the easiest way to control someone [is to] Remove their culture.” This thesis argues that the traumatic experiences of lost cultural identity, foodways, and sense of belonging enabled the plantation to reduce Blackness to enslavement.

Without spaces such as Middleton Place, the lasting effects of colonization may appear to be invisible and harmless within plantation landscapes and plantation futures. Borrowing from Singh’s racial healing framework, if this idea of land and extractive colonialism being inherently white is not redressed, how can plantation landscapes be anything but racist? Land and agriculture have left an enduring sting of white supremacist power, and most surviving plantation landscapes continue to regurgitate Black invisibility and racial constructs within the natural and built environment.

### **ADAPTATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

Middleton Place has responded to historic erasure by including immersive cooking experiences led by Black culinary historian Michael Twitty. Their digital and place-based messaging at the plantation site goes beyond the single narratives of whiteness that are typically shared on surviving plantations, but this site does seem to lack a response to plantation futures though. It appears to be stuck in enslavement and thus Black identity is trapped within this time piece. This helps to uplift the lived experiences and practices of enslaved people on the plantation landscape but does not offer any reimagination of plantation futures. Visitors can visit the museums, host events, and participate in self-guided/guided tours, but they cannot actively put their hands in the soil as recommended for Lot 1’s site design.

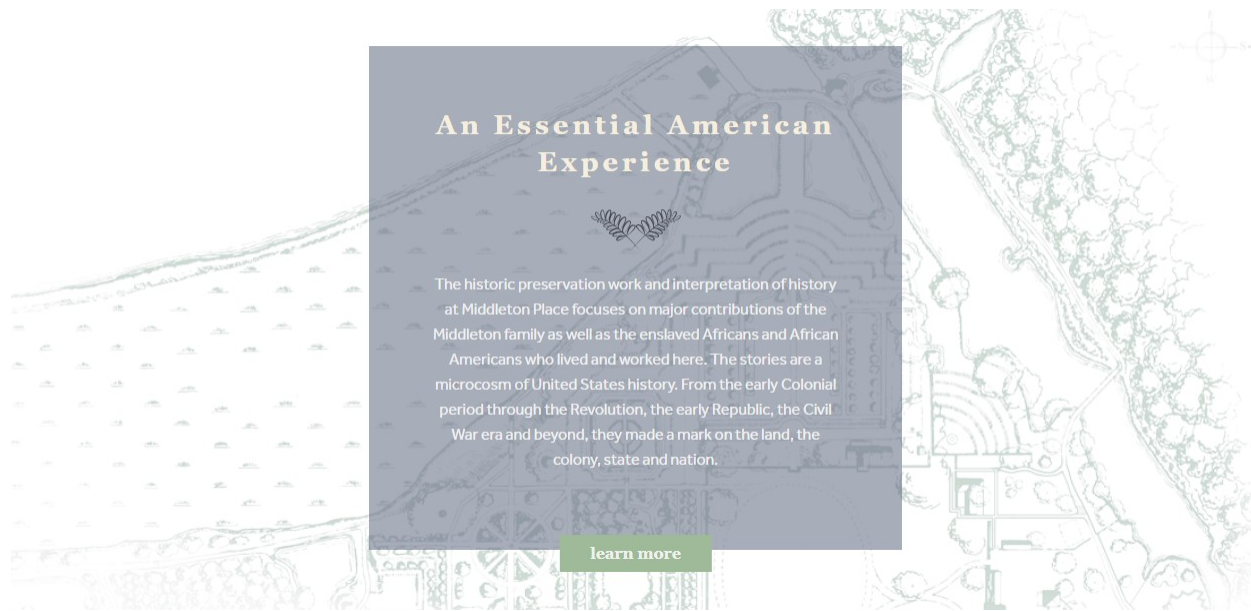


FIGURE 2.11 : Screenshot from Middleton Place's website with aerial view.



FIGURE 2.12 : Screenshot from Middleton Place's website.

## HEALING THROUGH UNLEARNING (COLONIAL TOURISM)

The educational wayfinding signage on Sapelo Island's remaining "Big House" or Reynolds Mansion (Georgia owned), celebrates white visitors and the past manipulations of the land as a plantation to assert white power. Yet, in actuality, Black women are still managing the

interior experiences of the Reynolds Mansion house's interior for group stays while a Black man most of the exterior landscaping. The Reynolds Mansion is a remaining anchor of the South End Plantation that has ample opportunity to, at minimum, revise its signage and existing language that is written for white visitors. Doing so would acknowledge the plantation's racial violence and help enhance Black visibility within the plantation's past and future. This erasure has to be addressed in order to loosen racism's grip on the plantation.

By unlearning, designers can help encourage others to engage in racial socialization in ways that prioritizes ending racist systems such as the plantation landscape. Greenwashing has helped advance the plantation's commitment to Black erasure. Sites such as Soul Fire Farm and Morning Glory Homestead deconstruct this notion and invite Black and Brown people to return to their ancestral lands and to re-engage in the joy of honoring Afro-Indigenous practices of reciprocity with the land.

A quick day trip or read of Sapelo's landscape reveals that there is a white Sapelo and a Black Sapelo. During the antebellum period, the plantation reinforced its definition of what it means to be Black in America. Most texts about Sapelo Island, including publications through the University of Georgia's Marine Institute (located on the former South End Plantation), do not humanize Black experiences. Buddy Sullivan, a widely known author and researcher of Sapelo, calls Reconstruction a period that was "controlled politically by a *powerful machine* of freed blacks" until being restored to their pre-Civil War owners." Sullivan and other white historians have also claimed that Spaulding was an agronomist who treated 350 enslaved Africans *well*. His widely praised successors, Coffin and Spaulding, dispossessed Geechee descendants to the only surviving community today in order to satisfy their own personal desires of an island retreat and wealth generator. Without an intentional unlearning process of this white gaze, racist language

and race-related constructs continue to be reified within the built and natural environment. This is a part of the unlearning and decolonizing our methodologies (Smith 2017). As designers, we cannot be fickle by accepting information about a site's previous land use from exclusively white sources.

This living Black community disapproves mainstream stereotypes that claim Black people are disinterested in land, water, and/or agriculture. This is not a fact, but rather a lingering stereotype baked in plantation trauma. But without more intentional site design that shares these stories from the perspective of BIPOC people, there is little room for unlearning the plantation's construct of race, land, and agriculture.

*Whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture, but it is very hard to see. [...] As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations. (Lipsitz 1995)*



## Vision & Innovation

### Sapelo's South End House and the Men Who Built It

Sapelo's South End House is one of the oldest surviving structures in McIntosh County. Completed in 1810, its tabby construction protected not only its residents, but the structure itself for over two centuries. Within these tabby walls are stories that contain a rich part of Sapelo's natural, cultural and architectural history.

Though many individuals played parts in the history of the South End House, it primarily stands today as a testament to the vision and innovation of three men: Thomas Spalding, Howard E. Coffin and Richard J. Reynolds, Jr.

**Howard E. Coffin**



Circa 1920, South End was renovated by its new owner Howard Earle Coffin, engineer and Vice President of Hudson Motorcar Company. Coffin employed architect Albert Kahn to make major changes to the interior, while remaining faithful to the original design of the exterior.

Coffin, a stickler for detail, spared no expense. He was known for redoing parts of the renovation many times until he was satisfied with the results, which were described by a reporter as "magnificent." Coffin also made numerous improvements to Sapelo Island's infrastructure.

The protected barrier island of Sapelo was obtained by the state of Georgia from R. J. Reynolds, Jr.'s widow, Annemore Schmidt Reynolds, via two separate transactions in 1969 and 1976.




**Thomas Spalding**



Thomas Spalding, one of Georgia's foremost planters, first gave structure to the South End House under the supervision of contractor Roswell King. The Palladian (Greek-Italianate) style home was begun as the main plantation dwelling during Spalding's 1805-06 U.S. senatorial term.

The South End House was atypical of the Southern plantation style. Instead of a columned front, Spalding's design was low to the ground to resist offshore storms. Its two to three feet thick tabby walls aided in the structural strength and kept the interior temperatures cooler in summer and warmer in the winter.

**Richard J. Reynolds, Jr.**



The last entrepreneur to own the mansion was Richard J. Reynolds, Jr., heir to the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. Reynolds updated the mansion soon after purchasing Sapelo Island in 1934.

He commissioned famous bird artist Athos Menaboni and his wife Sara to paint murals throughout the mansion, with the "Circus" themed room as the masterpiece. In 1949, Reynolds added air-conditioning to the house and turned it into a vacation rental.

Perhaps Reynolds' greatest legacies to Sapelo were the construction of facilities and support to the University of Georgia Marine Institute and his establishment of the Sapelo Island Research Foundation.



Single story, Palladian style home, Ionic order columns (originally six, now four)

Footprint: 90 feet by 65 feet  
Layout: Large central hall with fireplace, parlor on back side of great hall, library and kitchen flanking each end connected by column-lined openings (loggia)

Lived in: 32 years  
Material: Tabby and stucco  
Roof: Tar and sand  
Built by: Six men, two boys and two mules in two years

An indoor green and blue marble pool completed the decor. It had a fountain at the center and was dotted with specks of gold.



ring the Civil War, Spalding's descendants abandoned the ruins.



A partial restoration was undertaken in 1911 by the Sapelo Island Company, who added dormers and turned the house into a hunting lodge.



FIGURE 2.14: The signage in front of the Reynolds Mansion on the South End (Plantation) on Sapelo Island, Georgia (2021). The signage (eastern entry) reflects white power and Black invisibility within the socially constructed plantation landscape. Some sources state that tabby for the mansion's construction involved extraction of the Indigenous Shell Ring on the North End (plantation) near Chochat plantation. The only mention of Black people is mute and states that the original building was built by "six men, two boys, and two mules." Photo taken by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 2.15 : View of Reynolds Mansion, mirrored after original Spalding plantation design.

Photo taken by Whitney Barr.

## DECOLONIZING LANGUAGE

The normalized use of landscape/historic preservation terms “Cultural Landscapes” and “plantations” sanitize and romanticize the Old South and silo “culture” into what is deemed palatable within white definitions. According to professor Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick (Mires, Alanen, and Melnick 2001,3), most people would define “cultural landscapes” as falling anywhere between the extremes of wilderness and the city. Throughout their explanation, they fetishize Indigenous peoples’ relationship with land to ambiguous spiritual connections while making little mention of Indigenous occupation before colonialism. This omission supports the idea that culture does not exist unless it is deemed cultural by the white gaze. Additionally, the authors juxtapose wilderness with (white) trappers and homesteaders as if Black and Indigenous people do not exist within this definition. Yet, in any given week, one can witness Gullah Geechee descendants of Sapelo engaging in cultural experiences from the marsh to the woods with minimal evidence of human impact on the landscapes. Yet, these are the lesser known elements of culture that cannot be preserved and commercialized into a cultural landscape by Alanen and Melnick’s definition. There is a need for new definitions that include BIPOC communities who have not exploited landscapes for the sake of “culture” but instead have nurtured human-enviro relationships with the earth for centuries.

They also focus on cultural preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation, but none of these explicitly address anti-racist responses to former plantation landscapes. Designing for racial healing focuses on the intrinsic past, present, and future human-enviro relationships rather than prioritizing human manipulation of the site. These three terms may sanitize white involvement within these landscapes and distance humans from the racial healing that needs to happen in order to authentically honor these cultural landscapes. Perhaps the true environmental justice lies

in deconstructing these systems at the scene of the racist crimes- by telling the true and complete story (Chimamanda Adichie) and returning the cultural landscapes to the BIPOC communities so that they may begin to heal *their* spaces.

In my experience and research, landscape designers are largely trained to be uncritical of the studio design processes while being encouraged to document seemingly harmless processes that may actually be extractive, and to design potentially racist landscapes. For example, place making often becomes the driver for sustaining the surviving (anti-Black racist) conditions of plantation landscapes. If done in this manner, how is this any different from the historical design of plantation landscapes?

Anthropologist, Planner and CEO of Thrivance Group, Dr. Destiny Thomas explains that designers and built environment professionals must consider the legacy of American placemaking for Black Americans (“Opinion: Urbanism Is Complicit in Infra-Structural Racism — And Reparations Have a Place in the Built Environment” 2020). Often these spaces uphold white supremacist power structures, police Black behavior in public spaces, and confine and displace Black people forcefully. The plantation landscape was the original site of American placemaking and without a critical deconstruction, designers may contribute to “place-based manifestations of racist ideology and the institutions of slavery.”

## **HEALING THROUGH REFLECTION**

If designers can use mnemonic elements such as imagery, water, dappled light, and color for warmer memories, then can this method be used to authentically redress plantation futures? Critics of Black people returning to the land, also known as the “sankofa” movement, believe that returning to plantation landscapes is a violent reminder of enslavement that can trigger feelings of sadness, hurt, confusion, and anger. According to psychologist Singh, all of these

feelings are valid and can be expected in racialized spaces. Designer Walter Hood has used mnemonic elements within site design to enable participants to reflect on Diasporic African and Gullah Geechee memories (Hood 2017). Offering space for participants to sit and think offers a melodic balance to more mentally stimulating or interactive site features.



FIGURE 2:16: Hood sharing an Oakland streetscape honoring Black heroes.

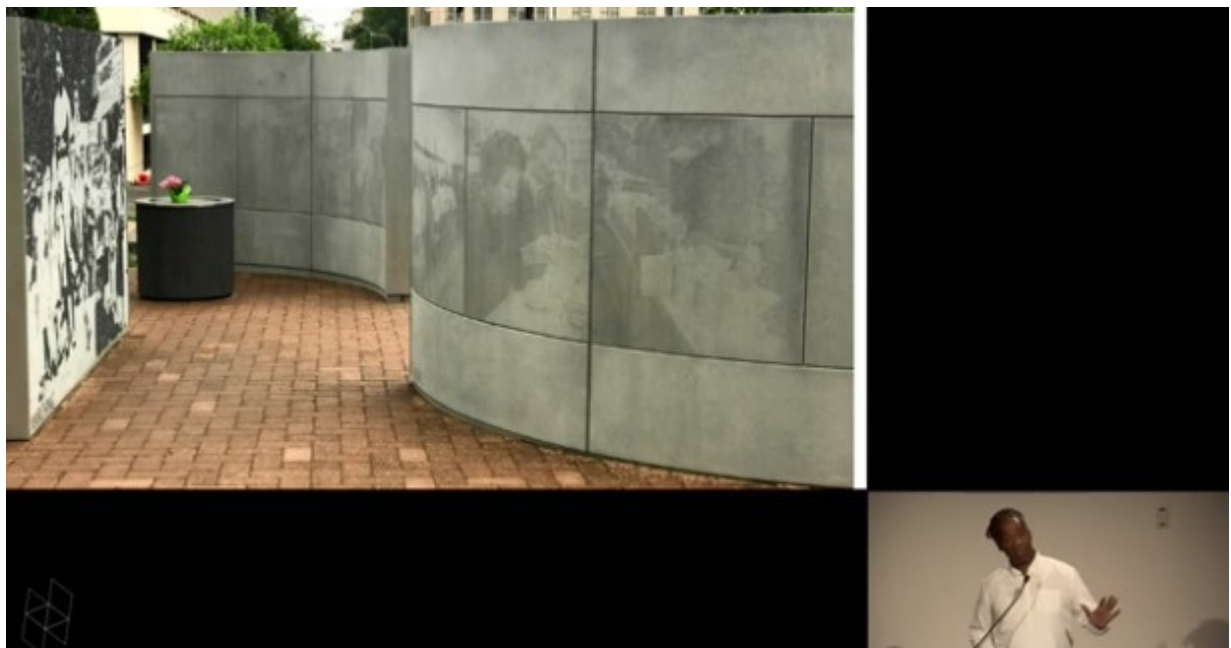


FIGURE 2:17: Hood sharing concrete witness walls honoring Black heroes



Figure 2:18: Hood Design with seating for reflection at site (Sourced from [Bloomberg 2017 article](#))

At Morning Glory's Campsite visitors can engage in reflective experiences of Gullah Campfires and learn firsthand accounts from the Geechee owners about growing up on St. Helena in South Carolina. Their campsite's open landscape leaves room for this reflective activity guided by the melodic voice of Geechee elders. With Sapelo's small aging population, there are a few people who give tours, but recordings for example may be needed in place of the live oratorical experience. This may prove to be an effective way of engaging outsiders in reflection, but more listening from the Sapelo descendants is needed in order to see if this is even a form of racial healing that they would like to see within their community.

Within Julie Dash's 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust*, Geechee women reflect within the live oak trees that overlook the marsh. On Sapelo, residents sometimes gather at spaces with similar viewsheds: the Marsh Landing dock, Cabretta Beach (Figure 2.19), north of Lot 1, and Long Tabby, former site of a sugar mill within the South End plantation).



FIGURE 2.19: Panoramic view of bridge to Cabretta Beach taken at sunset by Whitney Barr.

Within Lot 1, there is room to offer moments of reflection that help to ease and relieve emotional distress, especially giving the heaviness of the plantation landscape. Currently, volunteers have no shade space or viewpoints from the agricultural site for resting and reflection. Unintentionally, this perpetuates the void of rest within the plantation landscape and can lead to burnout/disinterest/disconnection from the plantation's future. Planting culturally relevant trees within Lot 1 would help support reflective activities and carbon sequestration within the ag-intensive space. I am also interested in the element of play in healing from the plantation.

Across the ocean at the Ikumbi Center for Sustainability in Kitengela, Kenya, semi private porches and the Nja gathering spaces are embedded within the sustainable agricultural site design, rather than detached from it. This allows for a merging of work and rest and a reexamination of Black relationships with land/agriculture. The use of wood also offers warmth to the working landscapes. Visitors may also find reflective space within the tactile guest house gardens of perennial herbs and light shade beneath the fruit trees. Borrowing from Singh's racial healing framework, we as people are whole and need rest in order to reclaim our whole racial

identities. Historically, rest and reflection had no place for Black people within the plantation system and while there is a growing number of Black farmers, few agricultural spaces incorporate reflection into the landscape. Reflection and labor can co-exist within Lot 1 and may help support volunteer and resident engagement. The Ikùmbì Center for Sustainability inspires a potential future for Lot 1, but the immediate needs of Lot 1 and the current budget are not conducive for some of the structures such as the learning laboratory and housing.

FIGURE 2:20: Context Map of Kenyan site (Google Maps).



FIGURE 2:21: Rendering of Ikumni Center Guest Houses and outdoor experiences (“Ikùmbì Center for Sustainability & Food Literacy: Kitengela, Kenya” n.d.).



FIGURE 2.22: Ikumbi Center Concept Plan (“Ikumbi Center for Sustainability & Food Literacy: Kitengela, Kenya” n.d.)



FIGURE 2.23: Ikumbi Center perspective of social and educational engagement with the site’s kitchen and gathering space (“Ikumbi Center for Sustainability & Food Literacy: Kitengela, Kenya” n.d.)



FIGURE 2.24: Ikumbi Center perspective of Barn and Teaching Farm (“Ikumbi Center for Sustainability & Food Literacy: Kitengela, Kenya” n.d.)

## HEALING THROUGH NOURISHMENT

### **NOURISH** - *to feed and cause to grow*

The final angle of thesis interest as it relates to racial healing invites designers to design for nourishment of the mind, body, and community. Plantation futures can use diasporic crops and plants to physically lead this process. Additionally, the act of seed saving and sustenance gardening is a labor of Black love that resists the plantation constructs of (human and land) extraction and focuses on reciprocal land practices. Within *jaden lakous* or kitchen gardens, one

can find diverse heirlooms that nourish the body, work with the soil, *and* reflect the African Diaspora. Within plantation futures, food must be a living landscape that people can engage with, learn from, and find nourishment.

### **ACCESSIBILITY AND THE BODY**

While some still grow Sapelo red peas and other crops on the island, most descendants travel by a 20-minute ferry ride and 20-30 minute car ride in order to reach a BI-LO in Darien. Currently, peas, cane, and some indigo are grown on Lot 1, but there is ample design opportunity to plant biodiverse crops, selected by Geechee descendants that offer holistic nourishment and increase quality food accessibility on island. Until the 1970s, Black midwives commonly took lead in women's Black women's health and actively practiced plant medicine. According to Geechee descendants on Sapelo, a visiting doctor used to come one Saturday a month, but outside of this effort, the Geechee people of Sapelo have largely self-sustained their own personal health.

Celebrating this eco-resilience, in spite of plantation dominance, is a form of design justice for plantation landscapes that once only needed Black bodies to be *healthy enough* for labor. Within a plantation future design, Afro-Indigenous health is prioritized and made accessible through plant material and intergenerational knowledge exchange.

### **PLANT MEDICINE AND FINANCIAL LIBERATION**

Farmer Cee, CEO of Green Heffa Farms, a boutique farm, in North Carolina focuses on healing through medicinal plants including tulsi, hibiscus, and hemp. In 2020, she took on the task of restoring a former sharecropper cabin into a tea house. Within the tea house, she plans to invite people to build connections with the teas, her family business, and to pause for a moment

with the land. This nourishing experience could be applicable to Lot 1 and the growing interest of cultivating life everlasting tea commercially.



FIGURE 2.25: Farmer Cee in front of sharecropper turned tea cabin.

As the Hog Hammock community thinks through their agricultural plans, budgeting forecasts should also be included to support wealth building. When interviewed, Farmer Cee emphasized the importance of creating generational wealth for Black families through agriculture. Just as nourishing of the individual is key to racial healing, so is wealth building for the resilience of these anti-racist spaces. Without a profit, Black geographies struggle to become fully reimagined and the complex and resilient Black experiences of communities such as Sapelo's are at threat of erasure.

## **ADAPTATIONS FOR FUTURE DESIGN SCENARIOS**

For the sake of this thesis, crop forecasts will be created, alongside an Agricultural Economics graduate student, and shared with community leaders. Due to the Geechee challenges of preserving land and fighting against cultural appropriation, land use suggestions, reparations<sup>1</sup>, and policy reform should also become part of this thesis' recommendations for the sustained nourishment of Lot 1 (Community Food Lab; Conservation Trust for North Carolina 2016).

While industrial agriculture systems continue to prioritize cash crops over food-producing vegetation and medicinal herbs, Lot 1 could play a small alternative through a focus on nourishment. Table 2.1 also shows the diasporic connection between peas, sugarcane, rice, and sweet potatoes/yams grown within the Gullah Geechee corridor, including Sapelo Island, and the West African coast.

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1

Soul Fire Farm's definition of reparations:

1. "Nothing about us, without us" - Dispossessed people get to define what reparations look like
2. "No strings attached" - transfers of land and resources without oversight or conditionality
3. "The whole pie" - give the land, money, and jobs away, even and especially when it entails personal and organizational sacrifice.

Crops	Bénin	Burkina Faso	Cabo Verde	Côte d'Ivoire	Gambia	Ghana	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Liberia	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Nigeria	Senegal	Sierra Leone	Tchad	Togo
Millet	1%	19%		1%	30%	3%	8%	3%		30%	3%	43%	6%	34%	2%	24%	3%
Sorghum	3%	27%		1%	8%	4%	1%	4%		22%	42%	19%	11%	6%	2%	26%	13%
Maize	31%	12%	46%	4%	9%	15%	14%	3%		11%	5%		12%	5%	2%	7%	32%
Cassava	9%		1%	5%	1%	13%	4%	1%	11%				12%	1%	22%	1%	10%
Cow peas		18%						1%		4%	10%	30%	7%	5%			
Rice	2%	2%		5%	16%	3%	27%	22%	42%	11%	9%		6%	5%	41%	4%	4%
Yams	7%			11%		6%							9%			1%	4%
Groundnuts	5%	6%		1%	29%	5%	6%	6%	1%	6%		5%	6%	37%	8%	12%	3%
Cocoa				32%		24%			10%				3%		3%		6%
Oil, palm fruit	1%			4%	1%	5%	9%	2%	3%				7%		2%		1%
Seed cotton	9%	8%		3%			1%	1%		7%			1%	1%		5%	5%
Cashew nuts	15%	1%		12%		1%		44%					1%	1%			
Sugar cane			2%						4%								
Pulses	1%		40%		3%	4%	2%	1%	1%		15%				7%	1%	1%
Tomatoes	1%		2%			1%							1%				
Natural rubber				2%					13%				1%				
Beans, dry	4%			1%		3%					3%					3%	13%
Sesame seed		2%			2%					1%		1%	1%			3%	
Plantains				6%		5%	3%	3%	4%				1%				
Coconuts	4%		3%					2%									
Fonio							9%			1%							
Peas											8%						

Crop rank by country 1 2 3 4 5

TABLE 2.1: West African crops by ranking (“Agriculture in Africa |AUDA-NEPAD” n.d.)

Cultivating diasporic crops on Sapelo could position the community to be a leading regional or global grower in connection with other Black farmers. Agriculture continues to expand across West African countries, yet one in four undernourished people in the world live in Africa. Agriculture is Georgia’s top export, with an estimated \$75 billion impact on the state’s economy, yet 13.2% of Chatham County and 1 in 5 Georgians is battling food insecurity.

## **BLACK (HERITAGE CROP) LANDSCAPES MATTER**

During the surge of Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, a portion of white America and non-Black POC finally acknowledged this country's foundation of racism and violence. Abolition activists spoke out about the role of the plantation overseer and its connection to present-day police brutality and the racial surveillance of Black and Brown people. For example, the world witnessed the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery, a young Black man who was simply jogging in Brunswick, Georgia, near Sapelo Island. Media companies released countless Black-owned books on unlearning racism and students, me included, helped curate reading lists for white and non-Black peers and colleagues. It quickly became clear that the field of landscape architecture at large still fails to address anti-racist design approaches or to critically address concerning terms such as place-making, cultural landscapes, and the plantation. Professors contacted me asking how they could "help". Planners and some landscape architects hosted Zoom workshops and Twitter chats about the violent role of race in public space and to question our roles as designers in reimagining more inclusive, safe spaces.

Through this thesis, I have tried to build a framework for approaching this work because Sapelo Island reminds me that there are still places in America where Black people live with the environment and without policing. On Sapelo, Blackness is organically intertwined into the environment. People fish, crab, garden, and hunt regularly in their utilitarian embrace of the island. There were once schools on the island. No more. There now stands a library and a recently re-sparked non-profit organization. Outside of this, public spaces are rare. With less than 100 African American landscape architects throughout the country, there is little empirical evidence of landscape design focused on the resilience of Black landscapes and Black culture within green spaces. However, landscape architecture's ability to manifest environmental

design on multiple time-spaces scales can be used to shift beyond socio-spatial Black imaginaries and physically support plantation futures. Given the plant expertise held within landscape architecture, the preservation of African diasporic crops should also be part of this conversation.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DECOLONIZED METHODOLOGY, FINDINGS, AND DESIGN PROCESS**

This chapter explores the design problem and methodology of choice. Then, the specific mixed-methods are addressed and organized into a design framework for racial healing. Finally, the chapter connects findings from the methods into a design process focused on program items that include diasporic crops and encourage racial healing.

### **DESIGN PROBLEM: LAND OWNERSHIP AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION**

Similar to other Black communities on former plantation landscapes within the Black Belt, Sapelo's plantation past has orchestrated its present-day "racialized uneven development" (Hardy, Milligan, and Heynen 2017; Heynen 2021). Geechee descendants have been fighting to hold onto their coastal land against the pressure of white plantation pasts and the invasive trend of present-day white vacation/second-home ownership. As of July 2020, the state of Georgia owns 97% of the island and there are 168 Saltwater Geechee Descendant-owned parcels within the surviving Hog Hammock community (Figure 3.1). Locally, there is a desire amongst Geechee descendants (albeit varied approaches and opinions) to preserve Geechee-owned land and place-based cultural practices, including their Sapelo foodways. Without access to their land, there is a high risk of food cultural erasure. Historically, most Geechee descendants grew their own food, but within the past 50 years, many have been forcefully displaced due to a lack of jobs, increasing property taxes, and the extremely limited ferry schedule. Amongst the roughly 40 descendants who do still live on island full time, many are seniors.

Additionally, 18% of the 14,000 surrounding McIntosh County residents are currently food insecure, a 3% rise since before the COVID-19 pandemic (Gundersen, C., M. Hake, A. Dewey, E. Engelhard (2020).

As mentioned previously, all of the historically Black communities of Sapelo Island have now been consolidated into one, Hog Hammock (434 acres total). Amongst state owned property, there are Heritage Authority parcels that are to be used for preserving culturally significant land on the island. Lot 1 is one of these parcels and under this clause, the property is to be used by Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS) in partnership with the state of Georgia, Department of Natural Resources, and the University of Georgia. There are five co-managed agricultural plots through the University of Georgia's Cornelia Walker Bailey Program on Land and Agriculture. The largest site (Lot 1) sits in the northern region of the Hog Hammock community on a 25 acre parcel off of one of the main roads, East Perimeter Road. This road runs through the entirety of the remaining Saltwater Geechee settlement so Lot 1 is easily accessible. This main road is also used to access historic First African Baptist Church and Farmers Alliance Building (located on the parcel south of Lot 1), Cabretta Beach for fishing/recreation/camping (located on the former North End Plantation), Kenan Tract of the former Kenan Plantation for hunting, and surrounding residential properties.

SICARS was founded in 1993 by descendants to educate all visitors about the island's Geechee history ("Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS)" n.d.). The organization's initiatives include: community education, land use and community planning, and sustainable economic development. Though most residents support this mission, there are conflicting opinions on how Lot 1 should be used and how Sapelo should preserve its land and its foodways. This design thesis attempts to offer some suggestions to this complex challenge.

Since the plantation system has had such a large presence on Sapelo, I decided to approach this local-diasporic dilemma through the lenses of racial healing and plantation futures.

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complex challenge. Since the plantation system has had such a large presence on Sapelo, I decided to approach this local-diasporic dilemma through the lenses of racial healing and

plantation futures.



FIGURE 3.1 UGA CWB agricultural plots and homeownership map by parcel, Hog Hammock

(Hardy, Milligan, and Heynen 2017)

## **UGA Cornelia Walker Bailey Program on Land and Agriculture**

Late SICARS board member and Sapelo descendant, Cornelia Walker Bailey, dedicated her life to cultural preservation and collaborated with partners such as Georgia Coastal Gourmet Farms, Clemson University, and the University of Georgia with the goal of growing crops such as purple ribbon sugarcane, indigo, and Sapelo red peas for sustainable economic development. For years, these partnerships and the crop yield grew. Unfortunately, in 2017, Mrs. Bailey passed away and Hurricane Matthew destroyed most of the agricultural fields. Culture Day, the largest event on Sapelo, was also canceled (and has been since then). Before her death, co-director Heynen promised to continue pursuing her goals of growing crops alongside Geechee descendants. Shortly after, Heynen and Maurice Bailey, her son, quickly agreed to co-lead the UGA Cornelia Walker Bailey Program on Land and Agriculture in honor of her legacy.

In January of 2019, the co-directors from UGA's Land and Ag Program stood in front of a group of Sapelonians at St. Luke's Baptist Church. Before they had a chance to engage, attendants began standing up and voicing their disapproval of the project, especially at Lot 1. They demanded answers about the unfinished Cultural Village Project that was supposed to be built at Lot 1. Folks wanted clarity about the program and some wanted UGA to no longer be involved on the island. While only a few directly expressed their anger, others were quiet and appeared pensive and hesitant about this project. Racial tension in that room was high and it was clear that there was not enough community buy-in in the program's approach, despite their well-intended efforts. To some, the agricultural efforts replaced the Cultural Village. Program leaders also wrestled with building a sustainable group of volunteers, especially Geechee descendants, to work and maintain the crop production within the former plantation landscape. Eventually all

non-descendants, including me, were asked to leave the meeting, reifying that when it came to land use and ownership, they still felt safer talking amongst each other. It became clear that this program was about more than just growing crops and people were not spending time or connected to this site because it was full of a racial trauma of has-beens. People wanted to see their values and their identity within the landscape. Aligned with SICARS's initiatives, they also wanted to reclaim space to share their Geechee culture and history. Design may help address these concerns.

## DESIGN GOALS + APPROACH

Because Blackness has been overly defined by the violent placelessness of the plantation, plantation futures must be actualized as part of healing from these racist definitions of what it means to be Black (McKittrick 2008). Katherine McKittrick's plantation future theory offers a spatial lens through which landscape designers, especially those who identify as part of the Diaspora, can explicitly address anti-Black racism and to actualize racially healed landscapes.



FIGURE 3.2: Original photo by Rinne Allen. Rendered response by Whitney Barr.

This study focuses on designing localized plantation future scenarios that (1) maintain a balance of capacity-oriented, community driven design suggestions and (2)

incorporate African Diasporic crops into racial healing program items.

In some cases, I allowed myself to explore “big” long term dreams of plantation futures without concern for cost that can be adapted and implemented into other Black communities. In other instances, I prioritized Sapelo Geechee-driven design suggestions that may advance cultural resilience and be feasibly implemented with the existing pool of community involvement and financial resources.

### **FOOD AS RESISTANCE TO THE PLANTATION LANDSCAPE**

Black foodways, such as Sapelo’s Geechee community, are ever present, yet often culturally appropriated or distanced from Black culture by overt and “colorblind” racism. The African Diasporic practice of growing food is a form of cultural resistance despite white supremacy’s controlling plantation landscape (Twitty 2017).

Ethnography is an effective research methodology for gaining deeper, introspective insight into cultural norms, social behaviors, and values- all of which influence and shape meaningful landscapes (Kingery 2001, 263). In order to develop a deepened understanding of Sapelo’s Geechee foodways, I adapted ethnographic design research methodology (Cranz 2016). This thesis’s ethnographic approach, born formally out of anthropology, accepts that there is no objective way for researchers or designers to be completely neutral. This thesis decolonizes the researcher at a distance approach for transparent, Black humanism. Because of my lived experience as a Black woman from South Carolina, I understand my connectedness to Sapelo and I am also aware of the distance between us. This is not intentional, but for the sake of my own racial healing, I am strategic about exerting this energy for non-Black audiences to understand or to worse, naively use this thesis’ finding for exploitative purposes on other landscapes.

Seventeen months of living and growing crops on the island, largely during the pandemic, offered me a rich emic perspective of the Geechee culture and foodways. Given the political nature of the land and the Geechee-UGA relationship, I also engaged in reflexive ethnography with Geechee ancestors who had been interviewed by Ray Crook and/or the 1930's Federal Writers' project. I explored the etic perspective in conjunction with the emic through historical documents, photographs, plant identification, site visits, and other traditional forms of ethnographic design research. If a source or medium seemed to help piece together my understanding of Geechee foodways and Black responses to plantation futures, I engaged and used coding to track thematic messages and to diasporic crops and to design proposed interventions for racial healing. The ethnographic methodology offered an integral framework for uncovering Black relationships to land in ways that no traditional method would have otherwise revealed.

### **Why Sapelo? The Personal is Political**

Shortly after beginning my MLA journey, I yearned for spaces that could satisfy my need for a sense of belonging and connectivity to food. Within the studio environment, I often found myself having an out of body experience. I was there but the design process that I was struggling to learn never seemed to fully resonate with me. In fact, the methods of site inventory, for example, felt extractive and disconnected from any experiences that I had had as a Black woman within the natural and built environment. If anything, something was starting to click. *So this is how designers make the powerful decisions about the future of places that they have never experienced?*

While the pragmatic functions of site inventory and analysis made sense, I did not know how to explicitly apply these methods to lived and living Black geographies into my work

(Reese 2020; McKittrick 2009). How were definitions of race, class, and gender being socialized within our learned case studies and design exercise? Though never discussed, I had already received messages about what it means to be BIPOC or white through institutional and cultural socialization such as: church, schools, television, and greenspaces (Singh 2018).

### **Pivotal Moments of Design-Research Inspiration**

During one design studio course, we took a trip down to Wormsloe Plantation (Savannah, GA) and stayed at a cabin formerly inhabited by enslaved Africans. While others may have lacked the racial consciousness, I felt the lingering heaviness of exploited Black labor, Black bodies, and Black agricultural expertise that was erased by our trip's broad stroke of seemingly harmless historic preservation and native plant initiatives. This plantation landscape reinforced colonial messages of Black placelessness and servitude with the construct of whiteness as power (McKittrick 2011). I saw no Black women there other than myself. The trip continued through the white gaze as if Black people and their connections to greenspaces were nonexistent. I retreated and avoided the rest of the trip and detached from the studio. Design felt too white and I had somehow gotten caught up in the game of learning how to white-wash and greenwash spaces. I had to get out. This was a triggering cycle of institutionalized and internalized racism (Singh 2008) in my racial healing journey. I thought that I had frankly gotten past this phase but the experience proved that the plantation landscape was triggering, yet unavoidable.

And then a saving grace came into my life. Meghan Hauser. Meghan worked at UGA and we shared a mutual mentor of many years. She listened as I shared some of my challenges and encouraged me to connect with Dr. Nik Heynen, a professor who was growing crops on a place I had never heard of- Sapelo Island, Georgia.

“Any songs you’d like to listen to?” Nik asked.

Just days before Nik and I connected, he warmly invited me to see the island for myself. He and Geechee descendant Maurice Bailey, were preparing for an upcoming meeting with the community to talk about the future of the agricultural project, named after Maurice's late mother, Mrs. Cornellia Walker Bailey. I jumped at the opportunity, searched for what to wear and bring, and purchased an unabridged version of Mrs. Bailey's memoir *God, Dr. Buzzard, and Mr. Bolito Man* at the now-closed 2nd and Charles on Atlanta Highway. To date, her text is the most-in depth memoir about Sapelo from a Saltwater Geechee perspective.

By the time Nik, Alice, an MEPD student, and I pulled up to the ferry dock in Darien, Georgia, I had re-read half of the text. The ways in which she immersed readers into the Geechee settlement communities: Raccoon Bluff, Belle Marsh, Hog Hammock, Shell Hammock, and Lumber Landing intrigued me. Matched with her words, I could see the vegetation she described and hoped to check for places she named to see if they were still standing. With just a surface read, these were just people going about their daily lives on this beautiful island. But I also gleaned from it the Black resistance to the oppressive and controlling nature of white landowners Richard Reynolds and Howard Coffin. I smiled when I read "okra" and I cried when Reynolds forcefully moved her and her family from their home in Belle Marsh on the North End to a smaller parcel in Hog Hammock for his economic gains. This text allowed me to live vicariously through Sapelo's past and offered a glimpse into Sapelo's present through Bailey's eyes. While she did not refer to herself in this way, Mrs. Bailey was an ecofeminist in my eyes. She understood the history of her home as a plantation and she rebuked the single white narratives told of Sapelo's past. Her work offers readers a Sapelo narrative through a Black woman's eyes. She acknowledged

racism's role on the island, but she did not let it win in her memoir, nor in her life's work as a grower, as a writer, a storyteller, an activist, and a griot.

This thesis would be nothing without her firsthand site inventory and analysis of the island's past, present, and future. I had no idea what to expect when I stepped out of that truck, but I felt connected, curious, and relieved that Sapelo still existed. Perhaps there were other ways to understand, love, and claim Black space within a landscape, even one with such a heavy colonial past and present. I had accidentally found a way to bring literature and the immersive nature of the ethnographic experience. Originally, I was just coming to Sapelo to help contribute to the agriculture program and to get my hands back into the soil. What came after was purely driven by experiences on the island and my social isolation in Athens. While ethnographic work takes at minimum a year to manifest, I found this process most appropriate for building trust and deepening my understanding of racial healing through the landscape as an engaged insider-outsider. Before taking on any particular design problem or opportunity, I just planted and listened.

## **SELECTED METHODS + DESIGN PROCESS**

Throughout this experience, I adapted a triangulation of the following methods: participant and behavioral observations, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, document/map analysis, and land use analysis/site inventory.

Due to the lack of literature on designing spaces for racial healing, I took time to slowly and intentionally learn about the island, Lot 1, and the Geechee descendants and culture. During the process, I began to group methods into a design framework with four action-oriented categories: relearn, unlearn, reflect, and nourish. This framework helped make sense of what it might take to decolonize my way of thinking about the plantation

landscape and to, then, visualize anti-racist design possibilities for plantation futures. For example, I used the traditional site inventory method of plant identification and challenged myself to (re)learn about Diasporic crops and medicinal herbs from Geechee elders and Black farmers. Most mainstream books about Sapelo are written by white authors often infantilize Black experiences on the island into a monolithic culture of the past.

Furthermore, this white gaze does not mention crops or herbs as a form of healing or liberation from the plantation landscape. In response, this (re)learning process goes against this deficit thinking of Black placelessness within (plantation) landscapes. (Re)learning through diasporic crops and medicinal plants hones in on a tangible way to reconcile with the past and to preserve Afro-Indigenous healing practices.

Black erasure is a common form of racism throughout Western literature, so I had to unlearn these Eurocentric narratives and exploitative land practices. This required resourcefully bringing together fragmented examples of everyday Geechee experiences on-island from Black-led mediums such as SICARS monthly newsletters, social media (farmers/growers/herbalists), and archival audio recordings. Without acknowledging Black erasure or thinking critically about the misrepresentation of Afro-Indigenous land practices, it is common for designers to perpetually design spaces that exclusively cater to white users and overlook racial healing opportunities.

Imagery from Black artists, interviews, social media, and lived experiences (on and off-island) aided my reflective phase. During this process, I reflected on how race is socialized and stigmatized in the natural and built environment. through moments of reflection helped translate diasporic agricultural values and traditions into a physical design.

Finally, I consulted with Black farmers, agricultural economics and horticulture graduate students, and external resources on ways to nourish community and wealth-building through crop modeling and budget forecasts. With this tangible, site-specific information, I reengaged with the Lot 1 leaders on potential racial healing design scenarios that could sustainably increase economic development.

TABLE 3.1: METHODS USED WITHIN RACIAL HEALING DESIGN  
FRAMEWORK:(RE)LEARN, UNLEARN, REFLECT, NOURISH

	<b>(Re)learn</b>	<b>Unlearn</b>	<b>Reflect</b>	<b>Nourish</b>
<b>Participant and Behavioral Observations</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Semi Structured Interviews with SapeloGeechee descendants</b>	X		X	X
<b>Focus Group with visiting Black volunteer group</b>			X	X
<b>Site Inventory + Analysis</b>	Diasporic Plant Identification + Research	Document, Map, and GIS Analysis, Pollinator Analysis		

## SKIN IN THE GAME: PARTICIPANT AND BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATIONS

Throughout my time living on Sapelo, I enjoyed getting my hands in the soil alongside the co-directors of the CWB Land and Ag program, Geechee descendant Maurice Bailey and Co-director and UGA Professor Nik Heynen. I kept copious notes and photos (taken by iPhone) about the existing site conditions and plants from the surrounding areas on the island. We piloted plots of indigo together and tested out different ways of harvesting varieties of sugarcane. Soon after joining the team, I volunteered to collect and take soil samples to the extension agency in order to understand the soil strengths and nutrients needs of the planting medium. Doing so gave me realistic planting design parameters that worked with and not against the landscape, as had previously been done within the plantation landscape. These conversations complimented my ongoing literature review of the island and reminded me that these sites are, in fact, *alive*.



FIGURES 3.3 AND 3.4: Field team of UGA students and CWB UGA Co-directors Heynen and M. Bailey.



FIGURE 3.5: Whitney Barr and student loading cane to trailer.



FIGURE 3.6: Whitney Barr and Nik Heynen sorting cane after harvest.

In addition to caring for the agricultural sites, I also started my own test plot in order to better understand culturally relevant and suitable plants for the loamy sand conditions. Rivercane from nearby and hog wire was used to build trellises. During the first summer, plants were grown in rows. But after losing squash and watermelon plants to inundated and saline soil conditions, I moved to a raised mound system. This proved to be especially helpful during a 2020 King tide event. I became more comfortable recommending plants (in the design scenarios) after caring for them throughout multiple seasons and processing into teas (a potential value add product that can drive revenue on Lot 1).



FIGURE 3.7: Image of descendant plot of peas and sweet potatoes (on raised mound) and  
 FIGURE 3.8: Amaranth going to seed in early fall (grown by Whitney Barr on island).



FIGURE 3.8: Sapelo red peas held by Whitney Barr. FIGURE 3.9: Reuse of river cane for garden trellis (Image taken by Whitney Barr).



FIGURE 3.10: Harvested hibiscus; FIGURE 3.11: Okra flower



FIGURE 3.13: Indigo seeds

Other field activities involved: planting, mulching, weeding, tilling, making rows, fence building, turning on the irrigation (early in the mornings before the summer heat), drying peas, and hand harvesting sugarcane.



FIGURE 3.14: Lot 1 Facing East after cane harvest. Photo taken by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 3.15: Geechee descendant and Davidson College student harvesting peas.

FIGURE 3.16: Leaves of Sapelo red peas. Both photos taken by Whitney Barr.

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING: VOLUNTEER TO DONOR PIPELINE**

During the summer of 2020, I also supported the team with a volunteer-to-donor pipeline strategy. I saw an opportunity for volunteers to learn more about the island during their visit so that they would be able to tell others a more holistic account of the island's history and the significance of preserving Geechee land. I leaned into my previous experience as a Garden

Manager at nonprofit Open Hand Atlanta and shared recommendations that could enhance the volunteer connection to the site/island and hopefully lead to increased advocacy and donorship. Early on, it became extremely apparent that capital was needed for this site's sustainability and without it, any design suggestions I had would be irrelevant. In addition to the volunteer-to-donor pipeline strategy, I researched and shared applicable grant opportunities with the UGA CWB team.

Funding from the Landscape Architecture Foundation's Community Design Scholarship and the pandemic induced-virtual learning environment afforded me the privilege of living and learning on-island for periods beginning in the summer of 2019. I should also mention that I developed a personal relationship with a non-descendant Sapelo resident and UGAMI employee. This immersive experience allowed me to build relationships with visiting university students and Geechee descendants of Sapelo. In addition to personal observations, I was able to casually and organically see how both outsiders and insiders engage and do not engage with the selected site.

Participant and behavioral observation also pushed me to scale from generally noting island-wide or regional Geechee land practices to specifically uncovering micro-cultures where locals gravitated to for social and cultural activities. I was invited to social situations, such as fish fries, oyster roasts, and barbeques, which introduced me to micro-cultures where Geechee people engaged with particular places and cultural practices in varied ways (Cranz 2016). I would like to stress the word invited as key to decolonizing this observational methodology. At these events, I took in the moments as someone with a similar culture spending time with Black elders. Folks would often ask me who I was and what I was doing on the island and I was honest about my role with CWB and as a student. I did not, however, worry people with any designer-research

agenda during these gatherings. I simply enjoyed the moments and appreciated the invitation into these spaces. Given UGA's extractive history with the island, it was really important for me to stand out as a person who was wanting to be of service to the project first. Sometimes mentioning "design" just further distanced me from people on the island. It was only really important for me to know that I was a design student. The most engaged community leaders were more interested in seeing me put in the physical labor needed to grow crops. Only after a year or so of physically seeing me engage in the ag project were people open to hearing how I weaved their vision and concerns into tangible solutions that they could implement themselves. When helpful afterward, I would engage in reflective journaling about where Geechee people went to seek joy and relaxation. I also challenged myself to note who engaged in growing what types of crops and medicinal herbs, both currently and in the island's past. I took note of the lack of Geechee people on the South End (former plantation name) where I lived on UGAMI's campus. Living here gave me convenient access to the Reynolds mansion and a firsthand account of the segregated Black Sapelo (Hog Hammock) vs. white Sapelo (UGAMI/Reynolds' Mansion). Personal observations through this process informed physical trace analysis, taxonomy diagrams, and concept maps. For example, if a designer sets out to have a specific goal with a historically oppressed and resilient group of people, they should consider releasing their stronghold on their albeit altruistic goals in order to be able to understand these memories within the landscape. For this thesis, Lot 1 holds memories of the plantation- cleared land, soil degradation, and peripheral ditches. But the deeper history of this plantation can only be understood through the collective and living memories of the Saltwater Geechee people. and while seeing what folks really want, do, and value. By doing so, the design solutions are less prescriptive and one can have a focused dialogue about concepts from a place of trust. This process should not be rushed.

Guiding observational thoughts included: What would bring Geechee descendants to this site? What design elements could invoke positive memories about growing food? If this selected site was to become a space for (re)growing food and racial healing, it needed to be large enough to offer value to descendants and be in an easily accessible location.

## DOCUMENT AND MAP ANALYSIS

Analyzing historic newsletters from SICARS demonstrated the ongoing sovereignty efforts including Culture Day, Jazz Night, and Black History Month programming. The newsletters revealed key Geechee community stakeholders, some of whom I interviewed, explained the history of sugarcane's return to the island, and highlighted the Sapelo red pea movement as a way to save the island's economy.

Before asking any descendants questions, I engaged in documents and map analysis so that my questions were direct, respectful (and not triggering), and relevant. This method familiarized me with the island's plantation history, guided me to remnants of plantations in existing sites, and helped me understand the breadth of Geechee activities before descendant communities were relocated and displaced due to acts of white supremacy and/or significant storm events.

Culture Day 2016 is CANCELED  
Due to Hurricane Matthew  
posted Sep 15, 2016, 3:46 PM by Sapelo Island Cultural &  
Revitalization Society [ updated Oct 10, 2016, 1:09 PM ]

**Culture Day** 2016 is **CANCELED** due to damage  
from Hurricane Matthew. We look forward to your  
support in future years.



Figure 3.17: SICARS announcement about Culture Day being canceled due to Hurricane Matthew.

While interviews were being conducted, a land use analysis of the selected research site (and Sapelo Island) was conducted via GIS. In addition to land use and property value, distance to nearby grocery stores and local markets, and historical sea level data were examined with interest to the coastal research site. The spatial analysis helped inform the proposed, Lot 1-specific locations of social activities and salt-tolerant, culturally relevant, diasporic vegetation.

### **POLLINATOR ANALYSIS**

Part of unlearning extractive plantation habits involves healing the soil by returning nutrients to the soil and habitat organisms. Thus, a pollinator assessment was conducted (Summer 2020) in order to observe existing pollinator-friendly vegetation and pollinators within the agricultural landscape during the peak growing season.

The aforementioned triangulation of methods informed this thesis' understanding of racial healing, Geechee descendant needs and desires, and the land's agricultural capabilities. Some methods such as interviews and focus groups successfully captured reflections on Sapelo's futures. Document and land analysis greatly informed the plant lists. Other methods such as social media analysis offered less tangible research connections but fueled creative and uplifting racial healing responses.

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS + TAXONOMY DIAGRAMS**

This mixed-method research study included semi-structured in-person/phone interviews with Sapelo residents of Gullah-Geechee descent who were willing to participate. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to gain access to less explicit and often complex understandings of everyday interactions with the landscapes. "The open-ended nature of such interview strategies [made] it possible for respondents to generate, challenge, clarify, elaborate, or recontextualize understandings of social movements" (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002,

95). In this specific case of Sapelo Island, the social movement surrounds cultural and land preservation through heirloom crops.

Residents were interviewed about their relationship to Sapelo Island, opinion of UGA's Agriculture and Land program, personal memory/connections to local agriculture and foodways, as well as their thoughts on the future of Sapelo Island as it relates to cultural preservation and racial healing. In some cases, residents were interviewed more than once for a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Interviews were recorded when feasible. In the absence of recording, copious notes and diagrams helped capture resident responses throughout 10 interviews. Residents were informed of my connections to Gullah-Geechee culture and the research intent during interviews to maintain transparency. It was also most fruitful to not introduce any site-specific questions related to the physical design too early.

Interview and focus group responses were analyzed both inductively and deductively using Rev AI for transcriptions and Atlas.ti for coding. Action codes related to intergenerational Geechee and African Diasporic activities of the past, present, and future. Using systems thinking, I connected trending activities to specific sites on the island and, when possible, reclaimed space for the activity to happen within Lot 1's design for an increased sense of belonging and cultural relevance. I also listened and open coded for:

- (1) values around agriculture and food from participants
- (2) opinions related to the physical futures of the island
- (3) thoughts about Lot 1 as a potential economic driver of food sovereignty
- (4) lived experiences or connections related to racial healing

## FOCUS GROUP

Early on in this project, I noted the recurring theme amongst descendants of brainstorming Sapelo's immediate future through saving the land. As a landscape architecture student, I became interested in going beyond solutions for saving the land to visualizing potential Black futures for the land, as McKittrick urges. The struggle of showing up authentically within greenspaces was already familiar to me as a Black woman. I knew that I was not alone in sharing this feeling; however, experiencing nature through Geechee descendants on the island visualized an unknown form of Black liberation with nature. The responses from the focus groups and the heightened visibility of the Black Lives Matter Movement (largely due to the hateful and racist murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery (Sapelo descendant), and George Floyd) also reminded me of Sapelo's special role in being a safe space for Black people to breathe, engage with nature, and not be policed.

When Black people learned about the island from me, they often quickly responded with a keen interest to visit the island and Lot 1. This response reflects the emersion stage of seeking safe spaces to engross within one's own racial community (Singh 2019). During this stage, one may also experience a greater need to connect with their own race for comfort/validation/sense of belonging after an incident of racism. So when the opportunity arose to ask a visiting volunteer group of 19 Black land activists (19 participants aged 20-25) what they thought about racial healing and plantation futures at Lot 1, I gratefully accepted it and prepared for our open-ended dialogue during the summer of 2020. IRB approval for interviews was received prior to conducting any interviews or this focus group.

## **FOCUS GROUP AGENDA**

- Introductions and pronoun sharing: As a Black feminist, It was important for this two-way discussion to be as racially and gender-inclusive as possible.
- Conversation starter/Storyboard Activity: What brought you here? What do you hope to see? Participants used assorted colored paper, markers, pens, and pencils to express their responses.
- After 15 minutes of reflection (with their selected music playing in the background), participants shared their responses and we engaged in conversation for 1hr 25 min.

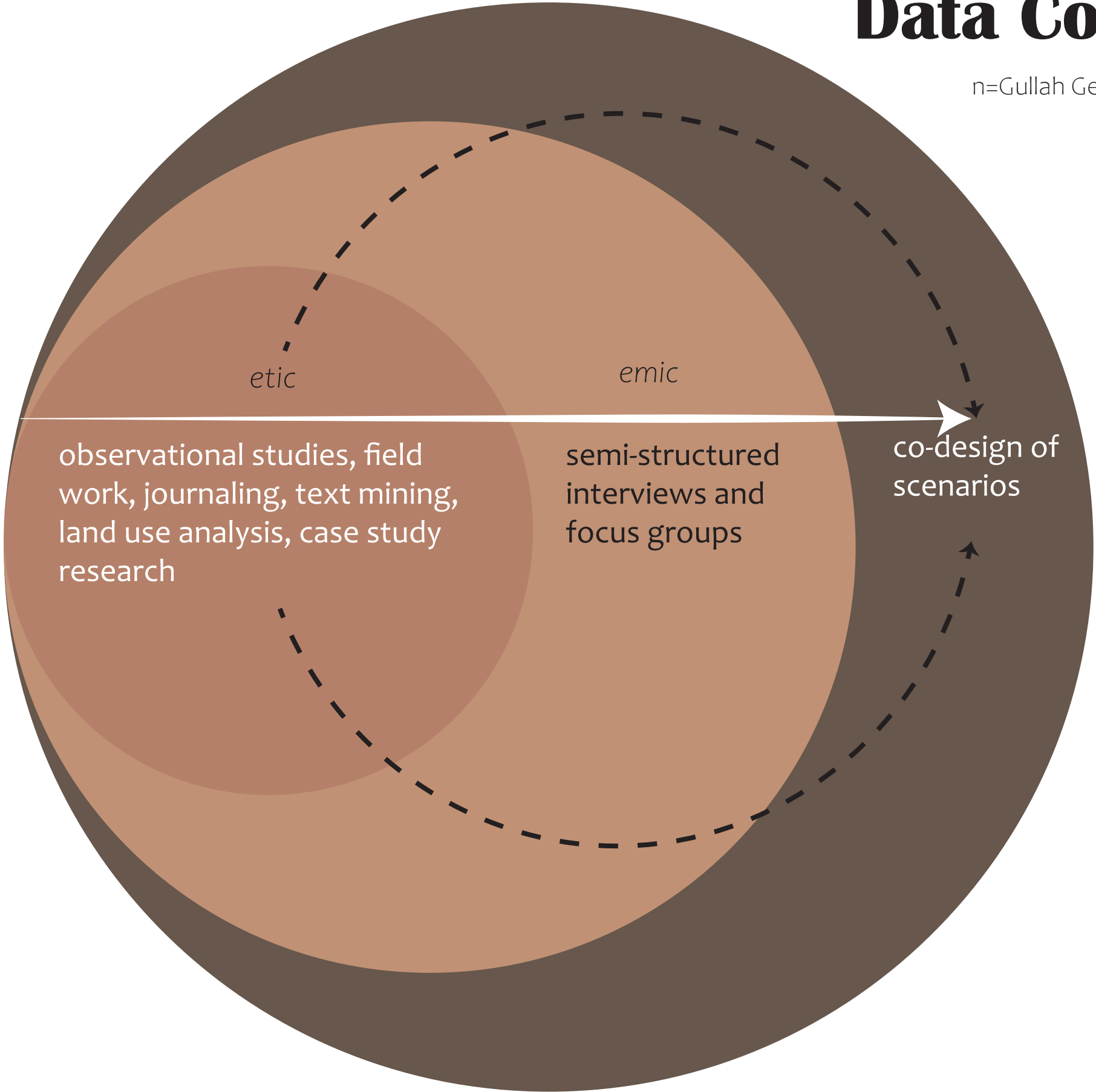
These results were also action and value coded. For example, I took note of the activities that participants expressed interest in doing again and/or in the future.

## **THESIS SCHEDULE OVERVIEW**

- The initial visit to Sapelo Island (January 2019)
- Fieldwork (Summer 2019)
- Exploratory research/observational studies/Literature Review (January-December 2019)
- Semi-structured Interviews (2020)
- Additional field involvement, case study research, design criteria development, conversations with Black farmers (ongoing/seasonal)
- Focus Group (Fall 2020)
- Iterative, participatory site design process (July 2020 - December 2020)
- Present final design and overall data findings to the community (Spring 2021)
- Write the final draft of the thesis and present to CED (Spring 2021)

# Data Collection Methods

n=Gullah Geechee Sapelo residents (<47) and descendants  
+  
19 select young Black land activists



## KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

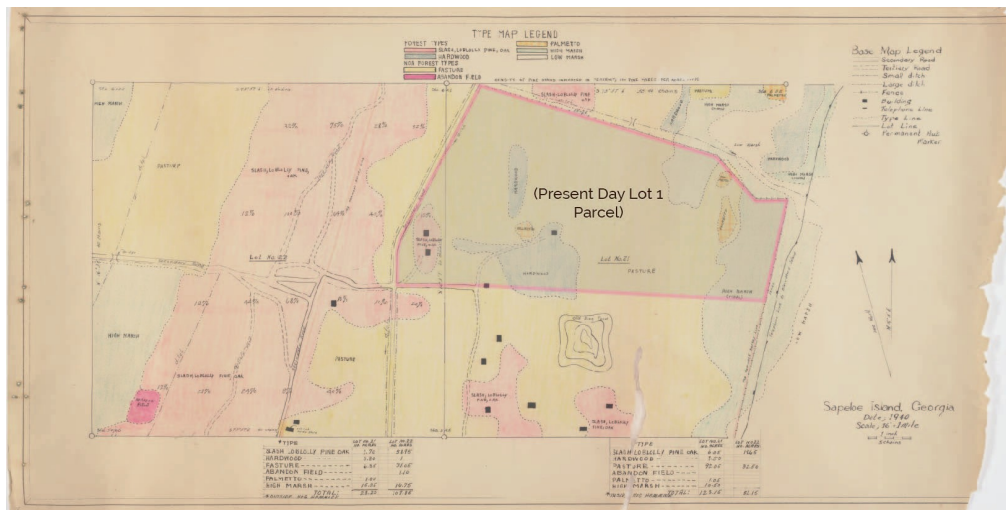


FIGURE 3.18: 1940 Map of Lot 1 drawn up for landowner Richard Reynolds.

### RACIAL LANDSCAPE CONDITIONS: CONNECTING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

The red line delineating the “Negro Survey Line” reflects the continued racialization of Sapelo Island for the sake of agricultural profitability. Reynolds requested this 1940s map to extend his agricultural pursuits and consolidate at least 14 communities, the largest being Raccoon Bluff, into smaller lots within Hog Hammock.

Residents revealed that until Reynolds died in 1964, it was common for Saltwater Geechees to only have the “option” of indoor plumbing and electricity if they relocated their lives to Hog Hammock. Most descendants were employed by Reynolds and had to either lose their job, leave the island, or move to Hog Hammock. Land swap strategies eventually won. As seen in the 1940 map and based on the 1996 National Register of Historic Places, it is likely that the large ditch located just north of the Hog Hammock boundary (north of Lot 1) delineated the former South End plantation from Kenan Tract plantation.

The Hog Hammock community is bounded on its east by marsh and a road on its west. The University of Georgia’s Marine Institute, a gift of former landowner R.J. Reynolds, sits 1.8

miles south of the Hog Hammock community next to a formerly displaced Black community. Understanding the sensitivity of land on Sapelo Island is important to consider when proposing any landscape design. Lot 1 is legally owned by the Heritage Authority which is an entity of the state of Georgia. So, this land is technically public but, through personal observational studies and resident interviews, it is not considered open to all--and certainly not viewed as a welcoming space for Saltwater Geechee people of Sapelo Island. In response to this, The University of Georgia's Cornelia Walker Bailey Program on Land and Agriculture seeks to decolonize this space through agricultural productivity of crops such as Sapelo red peas, purple ribbon sugarcane, and indigo. While this may generate financial capital, a plantation future can yield something more than productivity with rather than for the people of Sapelo- a co-designed landscape that pays homage to the Saltwater Geechee foodways and cultural resilience of the past, present, and future.

#### **UNLEARNED HISTORY** via document and map analysis

Historic maps revealed that Sapelo Island's road and ditch network and this network's naming system is largely the same as it was during enslavement. For example, locals still refer to major regions such as the North End and South End, which were formerly plantations. A 1940's map of Sapelo includes a segregated "Colored Store", today it is known as BJ's Confectionary, and the south end of Spalding's plantation begins at the north adjacent ditch to Lot 1. Spalding's agricultural journal entries reflect his obsessive economic interests in understanding the plantation's landscape so that he could maximize yields on crops (after southern rice was no longer competitive) such as sugarcane and sour oranges. There is no mention of working with the landscape to grow biodiverse crops and accounts of what enslaved people were growing on the

island are minimal, at most. These narratives live within Saltwater Geechee ancestors, living descendants, and a growing group of Black growers, farmers, and researchers.



FIGURE 3.19: Reflection of threats to Geechee culture and land.

## UNLEARNING: HEALING OF THE SOIL AND THE PHYSICAL SITE

### CONDITIONS SOIL TREATMENT AND EXISTING SOIL CONDITIONS

Healing the soil by replenishing it with the nutrients and environmental conditions needed is one of the most explicit steps of resistance towards a plantation future. Reynolds' agricultural journal submissions harp on extractive ways to increase crop yields for economic gain, yet there is no mention of reciprocal land stewardship or preserving foodways. This plantation mentality is still pervasive within Big Ag industries that prioritize agricultural economic development without concern for regenerative practices. This section journals steps taken to better understand the physical foundations of a healthy plantation future.

Soil testing in 2019 and 2020 showed that across Lot 1, the soil pH is less than 6.0 and lime may need to be raised pH for crops requiring slightly acidic soils (such as hibiscus). Lower topographic areas are also vulnerable to flooding and increasing salinity levels from the marsh east of the lot. The coastal soil is mostly sandy and slightly loamy so nutrient retention properties need humus and compost to slow the infiltration rate. 10-10-10 fertilizer and milorganite have been used on this site, but there is a growing need for compost. After consulting

with the Department of Natural Resources island manager, it was discovered that compost can be transported through vacant boxes on the barge, incrementally, or a barge can be requested for approximately \$4K. Though this step will be cumbersome, time-consuming, and costly, amending the soil with compost is a necessary step for optimal soil health, high yielding, and biodiverse crop production at the site. Former plantations often used enslaved labor, mules, and/or oxen to spread animal manure and/or marsh mud for compost. Thickening Lot 1’s soil should increase the germination rate and transplant success of pollinator-friendly plants, especially considering the sparse management team and inconsistent volunteers available.

Summary by Map Unit — McIntosh County, Georgia (GA191)						
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Component name (percent)	Rating reasons (numeric values)	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
RkA	Rutlege fine sand	Mineral soil	Rutlege (100%)	Not saline (1.00) Subaerial (1.00) pH (1.00) Frost-free days (0.90)	18.6	100.0%
<b>Totals for Area of Interest</b>					<b>18.6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

FIGURE 3.20: USGS Survey data on lot 1’s soil series.

**Ag & Environmental Services Labs**  
**Soil, Plant, and Water Laboratory**

<http://aesl.ces.uga.edu>  
Completed: March 26, 2019

Lab	Sample	ppm CaCO <sub>3</sub> /pH			Mehlich 1 mg/kg (ppm)					
		LBC <sup>1</sup>	LBCEq	pH <sup>2</sup>	Ca	K	Mg	Mn	P	Zn
43743	A1	642	1862	4.90	344	68.0	103.6	3.99	34.19	2.10
43744	A2	298	864	5.12	36	5.2	6.7	0.17	19.97	0.23
43745	A3	919	2665	4.38	239	32.5	87.6	1.42	16.04	2.13
43746	A4	414	1201	4.92	43	3.6	7.7	0.15	18.63	0.30
43747	A5	404	1172	4.94	45	8.9	9.4	0.19	17.38	0.34
43748	A6	368	1067	5.08	42	3.7	5.7	0.11	29.08	0.24
43749	A7	307	890	5.06	24	2.6	4.2	0.04	21.85	0.17
43750	A8	320	928	5.22	43	52.2	16.9	0.30	20.93	0.34
43751	A9	707	2050	3.89	130	32.3	60.9	0.74	1.66	0.87
43752	A10	1401	4063	4.06	431	109.8	266.4	2.95	6.83	1.73
43753	A11	878	2546	3.80	168	36.2	68.7	0.78	<0.91	0.80
43754	A12	1050	3045	4.10	182	54.0	102.5	0.73	8.07	0.59
43755	A14	1485	4307	4.02	446	89.9	235.2	3.11	4.35	2.31
43756	A15	1110	3219	5.08	805	128.4	210.8	5.69	66.83	5.28
43757	A16	1073	3112	4.13	218	51.6	109.2	1.22	7.24	1.51

FIGURE 3.21: Lot 1 2019 soil test results, UGA Cooperative Extension.



**Soil, Plant, and Water Laboratory**  
 2400 College Station Road  
 Athens, Georgia 30602-9105  
 Website: <http://aesl.ces.uga.edu>

**Soil Test Report**

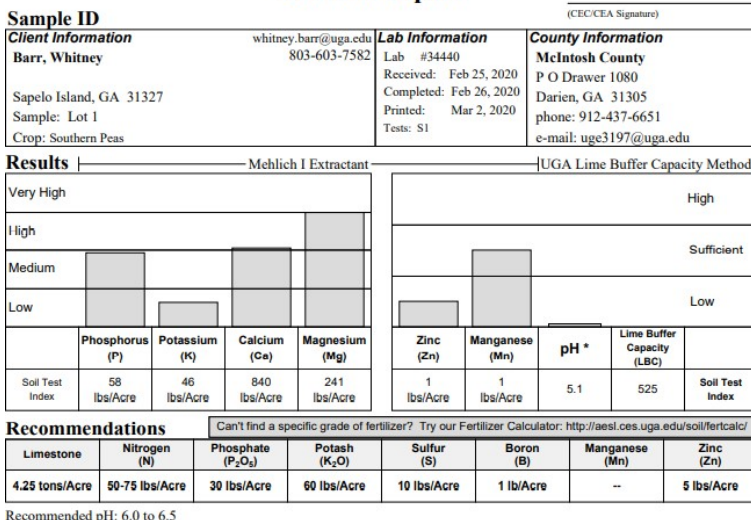


FIGURE 3.22: Lot 1 2020 soil test report and cowpea-specific soil recommendations, UGA Cooperative Extension.

**POLLINATOR ANALYSIS**

Upon entering this landscape, one can hear the rustling of the purple ribbon sugarcane blowing tall (4’-8’ in height) in the wind, the buzzing of furrow bees (*Halictus scabiosae*), and the pattering of the little blue dragonlet’s wings. Purple flowers from the Sapelo red pea vines boldly remain open despite the coastal Georgia heat beaming into this open canopy. With a closer look, one can also see the indigo shrubs starting to grow in masses amidst the invasive dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) and maid marian (*Rhexia nashii*) in the agricultural rows. Approximately 15 loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*) sporadically dot the perimeter of the 2 acres designated for select Sapelo Island heritage crops. Two cabbage palms (*Sabal palmetto*) remain on-site for some slight shade for growers, visitors, and volunteers.

This lot, part of the South End region, was used for pasture and cotton plantations. Thus, this site’s pollinator potential has not been fully maximized since arguably the Yessamee nation

occupied the land pre-colonialism. Currently, purple ribbon sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*), indigo (*Indigofera suffruticosa*), and Sapelo red peas (*Vigna unguiculata* var. *Sapelo red pea*) are grown on-site with a few pilot plantings of leafy greens, onions, and carrots on a seasonal basis. All harvest is grown with the intent to stimulate economic development within the community. But there is ample room to intentionally incorporate pollinator-friendly plants that can help increase crop yields, enhance pollinator habitat/nectar sources, and create a more welcoming space for visitors. Additionally, minimizing the use of galvanized materials, such as the existing metal fence, may help increase the exposure of pollutants to stormwater. This recommendation may help improve the water quality and, in turn, help provide more suitable growing conditions for pollinator-friendly plants (SITES Rating System 2019).

## **SUGARCANE**

The first successful commercial production of sugarcane in the United States took place on Sapelo Island in the early 1800s (Spalding 1844). In 2015, in partnership with Clemson University geneticist and the University of Georgia, a purple ribbon variety was re-established on Sapelo. After losing the cane crop in 2017 (Hurricane Irma), new sugarcane was planted in 2018 on Lot 1 in rows with 2'-3' spacing (for tiller/tractor ease). The heavy feeder grows on ~80% of the cultivated site and thrives from a soil pH of 6.0-6.5 that is high in nitrogen. Existing pH conditions are conducive for cane growth, but there is ample opportunity to use successional plantings of legumes such as the Sapelo red peas or indigo to increase nitrogen levels.

Additionally, sugarcane crops are typically low in pollen so they offer little value to pollinators. The sugarcane plots disrupt the movement, habitat, and pollen/nectar sources of varied pollinators that may have been better supported by the former plantation pasture or its Slash pine-Loblolly Pine-Live Oak landscapes. Pollen viability from sugarcane is low and when

grown through the asexual method of setts, flowering is unlikely. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence for the negative impacts of habitat alteration on pollinators and a need to repair this ecological damage done by previous plantation systems (Carvalho, Seymour, Veldtman, and Nicolson, 2010, 810). Incorporating diverse native and non-native vegetation can reduce the pollinator's distance to the natural environment, increase pollinator-dependent food crop production, and improve the aesthetic appeal of the site.

### **POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY VEGETATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

Any pollinator-friendly plants for this site should be suited for these disturbed soils and also be strong enough to endure some possible saltwater intrusions, high winds, and storm events. Flowering coastal and perennial shrubs such as elderberries (*Sambucus canadensis*), Ethiopian Red Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*), yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), and hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) around quadrants of the cane (rather than the traditional monoculture agricultural design) may help decrease the foraging distance for bees and offer healing values to the Hog Hammock community. Incorporating culturally relevant medicinal plants such as West African basil (*L. Ocimum gratissimum*), stinging nettle (*Cniduscolus stimulosus*), mullein (*Verbascum thapsus L. Scrophulariaceae*), Grains of Paradis (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3689184/>), life everlasting (*Helichrysum stoechas*), and jimson weed (*Datura stramonium*) offer space for honoring Gullah Geechee practices. A mix of perennial/annual natives and non-native meadow seed blends can also allow for an extended pollinating season (via successional plantings with varied peak flowering times). Sowing with seeds requires little seasonal mowing and minimal pruning (for ongoing maintenance) within this natural landscape.



FIGURE 3.23: Goldenrod and rhexia nashi

In spaces where there is a need for more shade, trees such as sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) can provide safe pollinator habitat and sources of food for butterfly varieties during their development. Leaf litter during the fall and winter can also provide habitat for the Eastern tiger swallowtails (*Papilio glaucus*) that have frequently been spotted on site.

The indigo is currently harvested for seed saving and dye because it continues to paint Lowcountry narratives of the Gullah Geechee community and the larger African diaspora. This shrubby west African legume can also help to return nitrogen into the landscape's Pleistocene soil and offer space for more pollinators. In previous late spring seasons, the indigo seeds were sown on bare soil without mulch or weed suppressing material so weed growth quickly outgrew the growth rate of most seedlings.

Incorporating pollinator plants within this portion of the site can help suppress weed growth throughout seasons. Edging is highly recommended for this ongoing agro-ecological planting approach.

## OBSERVED SITE BEHAVIOR

Beginning in May of 2019, we interplanted some of the Sapelo red peas, native to Sierra Leone, directly into the ground alongside the sugarcane to leverage the peas as a nitrogen fixer and a pollinator-friendly plant.



FIGURE 3.24: Rendered drone shot of cultivated (light green) and uncultivated (dark green) areas at Lot 1.

Unfortunately, the pea growth stunted and did not mature to the flowering state needed for optimal pollinator environment conditions. This may have been due to the tight spacing (~1' apart) or due to poor drainage on extremely flat coastal topography. The red peas grown in the raised beds have yielded plentiful harvests. Planting red peas in mounds above the sugarcane setts may have been more successful.

Additionally, the interplanting of peas could help decrease the distance to pollen sources. Outside of this effort, no pollinator-friendly plants have been planted at this site. The site is managed by controlled fire. These fires allow for pine tree regeneration and ground layer and shrub management. This may pose a concern for the vertical hierarchy of pollinator-friendly habitat in particular. These plantings would need to be strategically planted outside the

“line of fire.” In between the rows of the cane and on the perimeter where cultivation meets “nature”, there are some plants of interest that should be noted such as dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), marsh fleabane (*Pluchea odorata*), Rosy Camphorweed (*Pluchea baccharis*-great for pollinators), Pennsylvania Blackberry (*Rubus pensilvanicus*), Carolina ruellia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*), Chamberbitter (*Phyllanthus urinaria*), Shining sumac (*Rhus copallinum*), and Southern Dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*).



FIGURE 3.25: Naturally growing muhly grass near Nannygoat beach and Mullein near Sapelo Lighthouse.

### UNLEARNING: HYDROLOGY OVERVIEW AND OBSERVATIONS

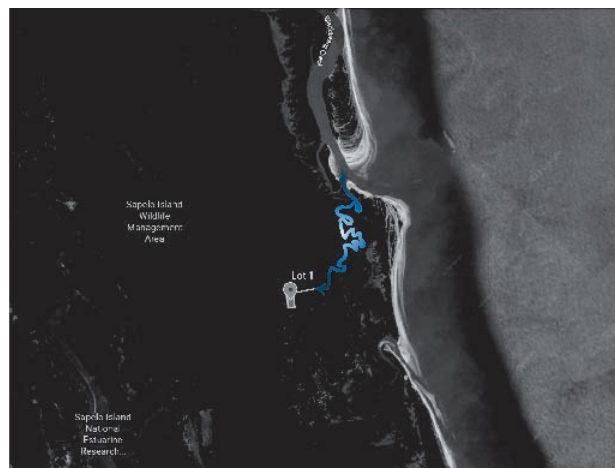


FIGURE 3.26: Water Flow at Lot 1

Water flows in and out of Lot 1 through Blackbeard Creek. Daily there are four tides (two low and two high tides). Sapelo Island is 12 miles long, 3.1 miles wide, and situated 11.7

miles south of St. Catherine’s Island. There is no connecting bridge, so most people reach Sapelo by ferry boat managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Storm surge-driven inundations such as Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Irma are of greater concern to the future of Sapelo Island. By NOAA’s [definition](#), storm surge measures “the abnormal rise of water generated by a storm, over and above the normal astronomical tide, and is expressed in terms of height above predicted or expected tide levels.” Thus, the maps address the surface elevation (NAVD88 datum) on Sapelo Island along with Mean Higher High Water Data (NOAA tidal datums). Also, the tidal elevation of historical, extreme storm events is needed to perform a risk analysis for the location of utilities, especially electrical equipment. Further research and GIS mapping are needed to determine more localized data on Sapelo’s (and Lot 1’s) height above Mean Highest Tide (MHHW). Survey data collection was attempted using a Real Time Kinematic Trimble Sensor, but the cell tower reception was repeatedly too weak for collecting substantial elevation points. GIS data layers were shared with the researcher as part of the site inventory process.

Most of Lot 1’s parcel is 1.2 (3.9 ft) -1.8 M (5.9 ft) above high tide. The lot is also buffered by the tidal wetland. Thus, there is some reassurance that this site can potentially be resilient, remain (mostly) dry, and experience minimal saltwater intrusion- all of which are agricultural concerns for the heritage crops.

#### Important Terms:

- Mean Higher High Water: average height of the highest tide recorded at a tide station each day during the recording period
- Mean High Water: the average of all the high water heights observed over the National Tidal Datum Epoch

- Mean Lower Low Water: average height of the lowest tide recorded at a tide station each day during a 19-year recording period, known as the National Tidal Datum Epoch
- Mean Low Water: the average of the lower low water height of each tidal day observed over the National Tidal Datum Epoch

#### Hog Hammock Site Elevation Data (NAVD88)

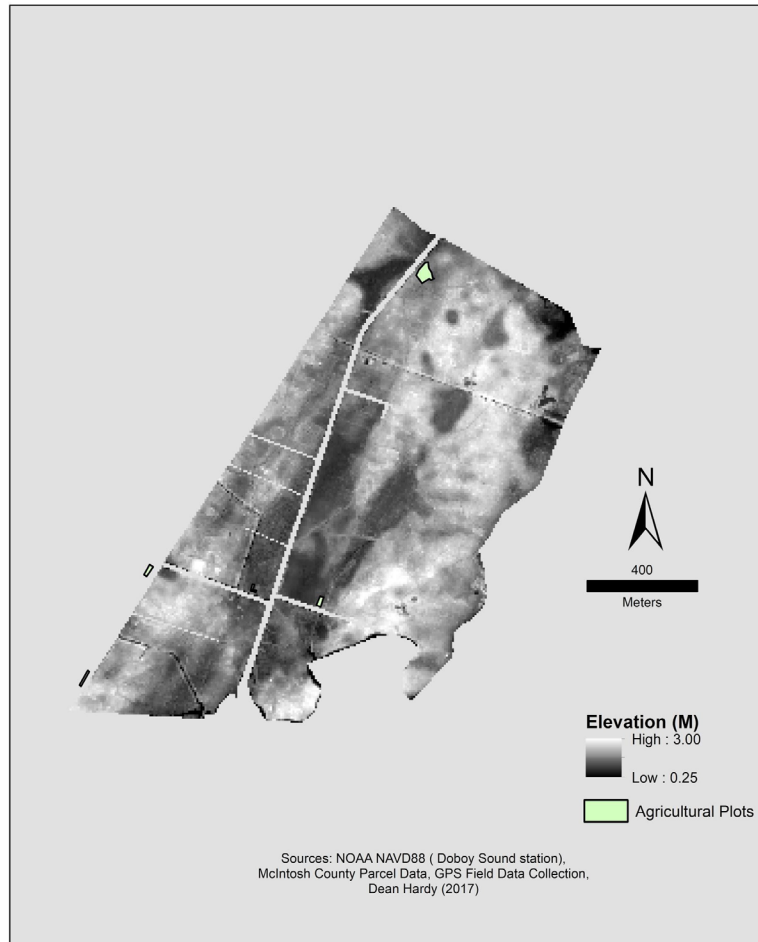
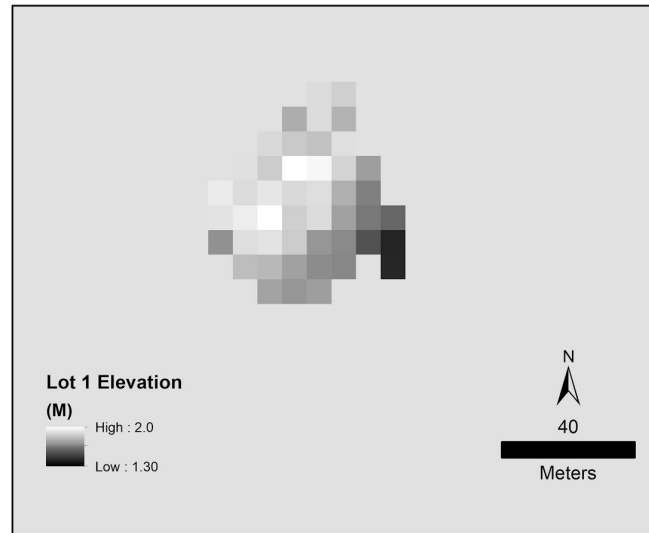


FIGURE 3.27: Elevation map of Hog Hammock. Data retrieved from Dr. Dean Hardy. Map by Whitney Barr.

## Lot 1 Elevation Data (NAVD88)



Sources: NOAA NAVD88 ( Dobby Sound station),  
McIntosh County Parcel Data, GPS Field Data Collection,  
Dean Hardy (2017)

FIGURE 3.28: Elevation map of Lot 1. Data retrieved from Dr. Dean Hardy. Map by Whitney

Barr.

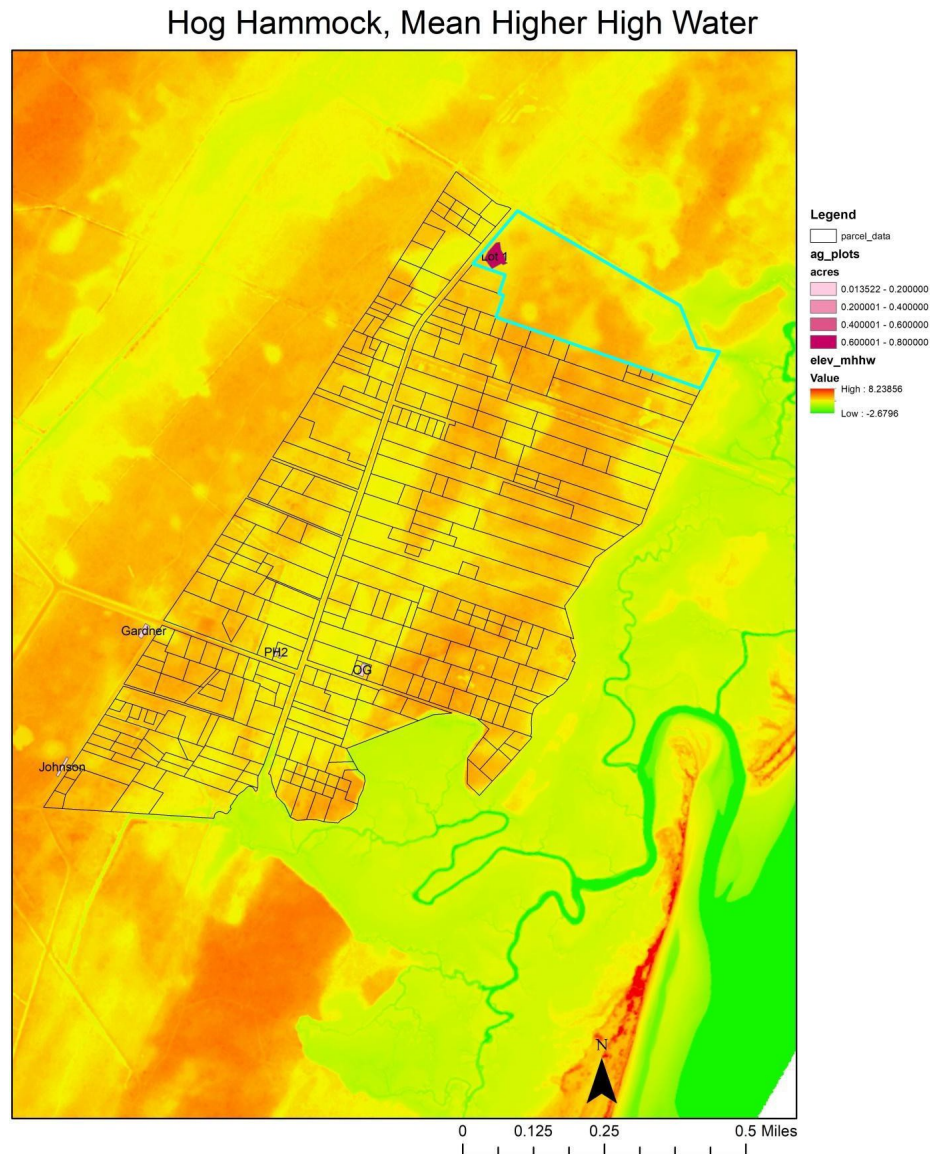


FIGURE 3.29: Mean Higher High Water Map of Hog Hammock. Data retrieved from Dr. Dean Hardy. Map by Whitney Barr. Due to this site's coastal location, the height of low and high tides needed to be considered. This map shows that mean higher high water levels at Lot 1 are lower in comparison to southeastern portions of Hog Hammock.

Dean Hardy's map confirms that the majority of lot 1 sits above the mean high tide level.

Lot 1 is irrigated through a pipe that connects to a resident's well. To deter wild cattle, deer, and hogs from entering the gated site, a bare-soil ditch was dug by hand west of the site's point of entry. Stormwater feeds into the ditch and inconsistently drains from the site's higher elevation south towards the Hog Hammock community.

Freshwater vegetation including (but not limited to): broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*) and mayflower marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle umbrellata*) have since filled in patches. At times, the ditches are full for more than 48 hours. Otters have also been spotted swimming through the inundated ditches. This is of concern because it can limit biodiversity (impacting pollinators), collect pollutants (from surface runoff), and increase mosquito/pest environments. Reshaping this ditch into a swale with side slopes steeper than 3:1 and no wider than 4:1 would offer more efficient stormwater drainage and soil erosion management. These factors may impede the conditions needed for pollinator erosion. Additionally, including native pollinator plants that can tolerate periodic inundation could increase the presence of pollinators within this corridor.

*Though this site contains various native and pollinator-friendly herbaceous plants and shrubs, there is ample room for more pollinator support.*



FIGURE 3.30: View of Lot 1 after King tide event. Photo taken by Whitney Barr.

## **REFLECTION: GEECHEE DESCENDANT RESPONSES VIA SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS, AND TAXONOMY DIAGRAMS**

These methods revealed local trust and land challenges that a site design cannot solve. Some descendants shared that they would or currently do welcome outsiders to Sapelo, especially to support saving land and cultural preservation. Some expressed hope for Lot 1 and the larger island, while others alluded to enjoying the island while they can before it becomes developed. Due to the extremely small island population, I have avoided any identifying language that may reveal a specific resident.

Interviews and casual conversations with descendants also reflected the presence of the “white man” in defining Blackness and/or achieving wealth. One respondent expressed that they were raised to “work and be like the white man...so how can we come together [as an island] now to save ourselves?” Their apprehension in trusting other residents was also shared by others. To some, white visitors symbolized money from purchasing meals and tours, for example. But there was also an unspoken tension of what should and should not be shared with outsiders about the island. These findings had to be considered within the design.

Younger residents largely shared that they were “tired of hearing about the old days” and that they also were interested in Sapelo’s Geechee future. They also seemed to enjoy being indoors with internet rather than being outdoors. Design suggestions needed to motivate young descendants and residents to return to the island and interactively engage in the past and future.

In order to translate these varied values into physical design, I used tree form taxonomy diagrams. The spatial relationship diagrams helped organize and analyze the perspectives of individual users, values, and their connections to Lot 1 and Sapelo Island. The four groups of interest for this study are the Gullah Geechee descendants, Black tourists, Black students, and

the larger group of Geechee descendants. Mapping out their specific activities and relevant items and where they perform these activities onisland revealed a strong recurring theme of diasporic activity and a thirst for Geechee foodways. Black tourists, if they know Sapelo even exists, come with an eager amount of energy and interest in understanding the past, present, and future of this unique Black community. It does not take long for a Black person who is visiting to see that Sapelo Island is a special place that many of us have never witnessed before. On Sapelo, thereare Black people engaged in the natural environment in ways that most of us have never witnessed in our lives, but have, at most, only heard about through passed downstories. But unfortunately, as of 2020, there are very few wayfinding signs on the island in order to help visitors understand the living Geechee history of Sapelo. Without a tour guide or Sapelo family members, Black visitors, myself included, may find themselves trying to fill this void of Black placelessness. Even without a tour, knowing that our ancestors lived on this land is enough for the Black imagination to smile, to cry, to have questions, and to want to connect to a culture that feels so foreign, yet so familiar. Based on my lived experience and time on Sapelo, this intangible feeling is a moment of racial healing. There is an unimaginable amount of freedom, peace, and tranquility on this island that cannot be heard or seen in the urban spaces or even in former black suburbs that have them replaced by the latest fast-food chain(s). Unlike other tourist destinations, these racial healing experiences on Sapelo are not presented in a consumer package. There is no official museum. There are very few tombstones. There are remnants of an old Black cemetery (New Orleans). While there is no way to fully know how the hands grew, harvested, and prepared meals for people across this island and the South, remnants of this life do exist on Sapelo. As a Black southern woman, when I anchor my feet into this fertile ground and run soil through my fingers, I feel all of this activity that my ancestors were once

engaged in. I am reminded of their oppression but also of their strength. I think about how many people may have hung from those live oak trees draped in Spanish moss. I think about how it must have felt to run through rows of sugarcane. On days when we harvested sugarcane late in October after heavy rain or planted red peas on an early May morning, I wondered what the ancestors were thinking. I wondered what other crops they grew that we may never uncover because of the hidden legacy of the African diaspora in this country that we now call home as Blackpeople. Selfishly, I want other Black people to share the same experience. I want Sapelo to always be available for us to re-engage with our ancestors and our seniors and our elders. I want little Black boys and girls to have a chance to learn about agriculture in a way that does not stigmatize the idea of Black people playing in the dirt or hanging outside.

Open coding revealed common foods grown and eaten on the island (informing plant design), the island's history of self-organizing (land use and program items), Geechee interest in cultural preservation, the need for place-based activities (program items), and the varied opinions about the island's physical future.

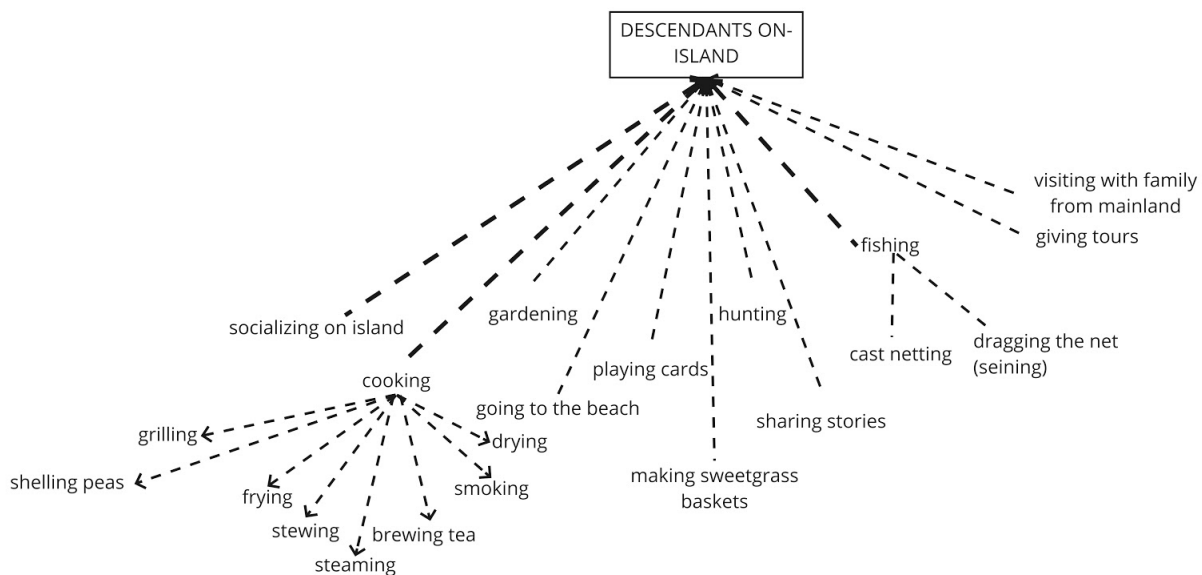


FIGURE 3.30: Taxonomy diagram of trending activities amongst descendants(action coding). Frequently expressed activities are shown with increased lineweight.

### ***In the news...***

SICARS recently acquired 25 acres from the state of Georgia, north of First African Baptist Church, to develop a Cultural Village. The land is valued at \$1 million. The tourist attraction will include a classroom, chapel, museum and a playground. ... SICARS' volunteer beekeepers, Dorset Hurley and Larry Johnson have restocked the SICARS bee colonies, and hopefully there will be honey by next summer. ...

Our next challenge is to complete the Cultural Village on the 25 acres of land in Hog Hammock. We must raise \$1.6 million dollars. The clock started running July 1, 2008. Our time line is: 18 months to complete the feasibility study; 18 months to complete the design and documents; and 60 months to complete the project.

We need you to succeed, we need you time, ideas, and monetary donations. Help us to make 2009 bigger, and more successful.

— **Charles Hall, Board President**

FIGURE 3.31: Clipping about the launch of Cultural Village Project at Lot 1 in 2008 from SICARS Griot Newsletter.

## **HEALING THROUGH THE LENS OF VISITING BLACK**

### **LAND ACTIVISTS/VOLUNTEERS (FOCUS GROUP)**

I also reflected on their recurring thoughts on their reasons for coming to Sapelo and Sapelo's role in Black liberation politics, emergent strategy, and the landscape as aliving Sankofa, where one can "Go back and get it". I used the qualitative data to inform a scenario of eco-tourism, through the agency of Geechee descendants, that satisfies the participants' expressed needs for *emergence in Black communities*. Additionally, I paired participant emergent interests in foodways and Geechee culture crops with the expressed plantation futures of Geechee descendants. I also looked for similarities in activities between the visiting group and Geechee descendants.

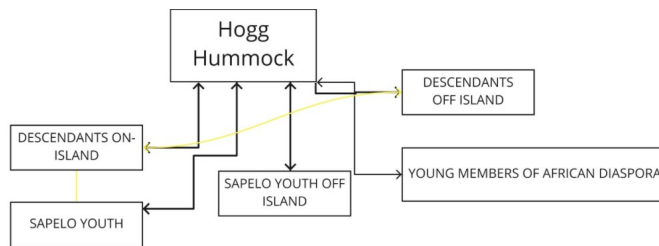


FIGURE 3.32: Diagram of key stakeholders. Yellow lines denote key intergenerational, descendant relationships.

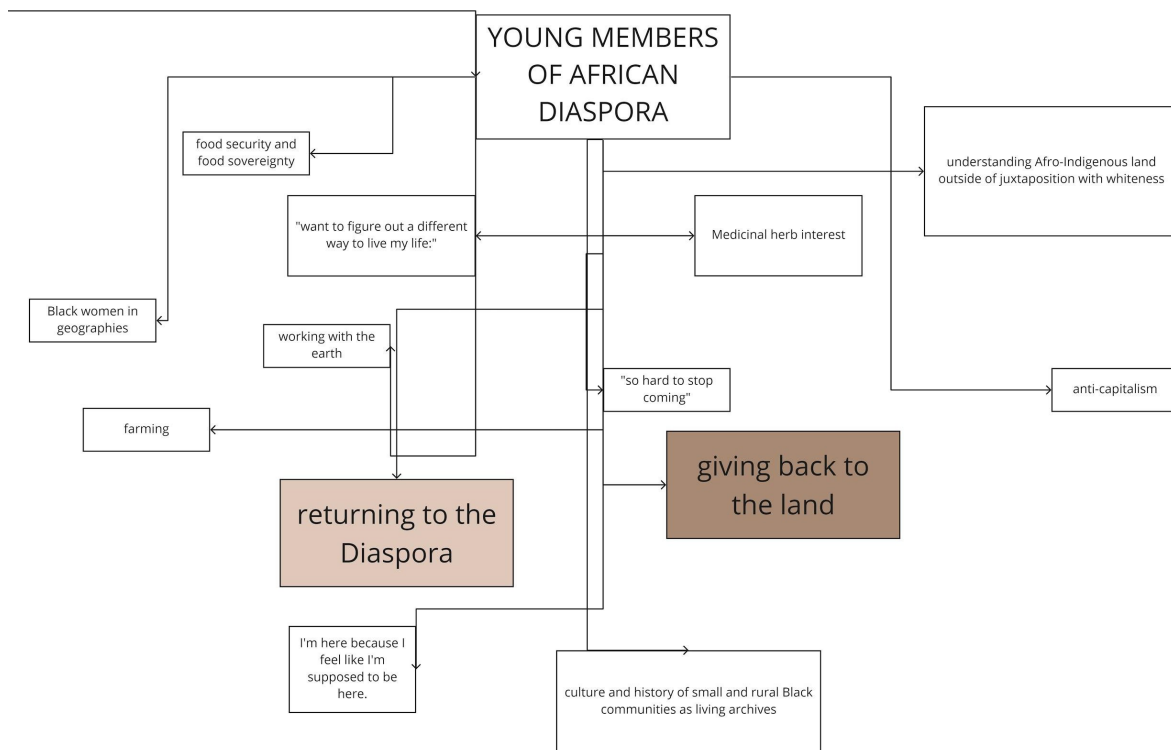


FIGURE 3.33: Diagram of values expressed by focus group participants. Key findings are organized by the size of the polygons and the most commonly expressed interests are rendered (with nude colors).

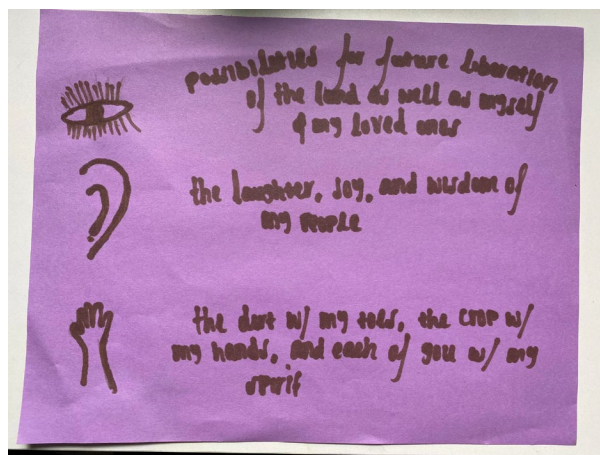


FIGURE 3.34: Sample response from a focus group participant. Codes: collective joy, tactile experience, and ancestral connections were used as inspiration for program items within the design scenarios.

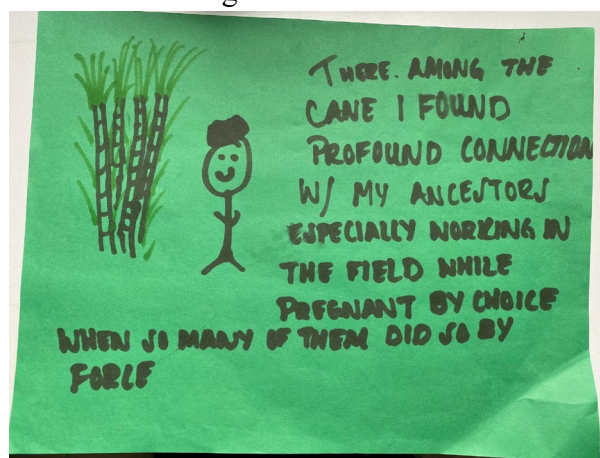


FIGURE 3.35: Sample response from a focus group participant. Codes: fertility, collective memory, and tactile experience were used as inspiration for program items within the design scenarios.

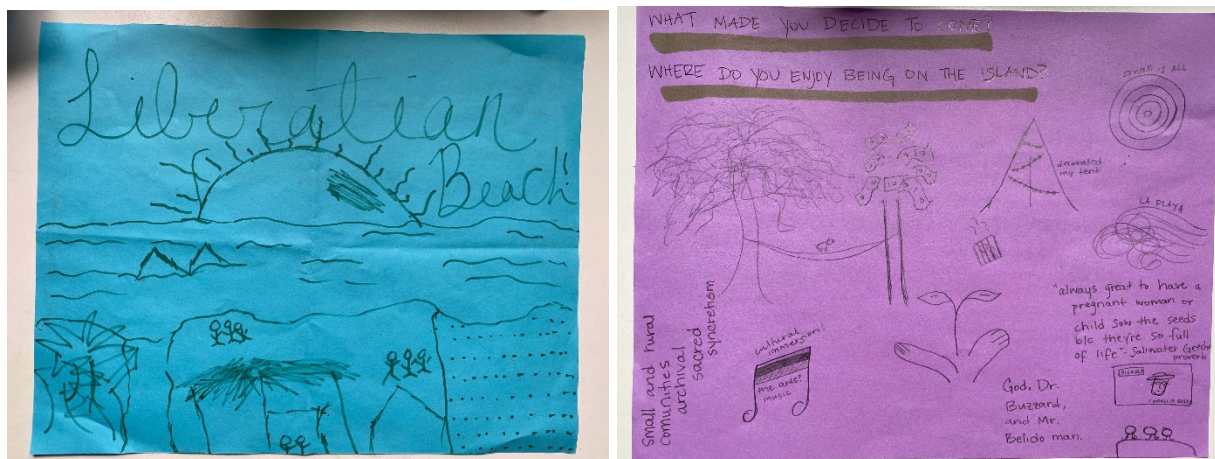


FIGURE 3.36: Sample response from a focus group participant. Other codes included: archival sacred syncretism, cultural immersion, community building, music, and education were used as inspiration for program items within the design scenarios.



FIGURE 3.37: Reflection on tangible and intangible ways to infuse culture into landscape design.

Mrs. Bailey's memoir and Ray Crook's *Sapelo Voices* (interviews co-facilitated with Bailey) provided ample crop and medicinal plant design suggestions. Mrs. Bailey's text offered substantial cultural context around Saltwater Geechee plant uses on Georgia's coast that have been embraced since slavery.

TABLE 3.2: Culturally Relevant Plantings and Terms Table Excerpt from Text Mining

*God, Dr. Buzzard, and Mr. Bolito Man.*

Name	Reference/Explanation	Page
Dayclean	“just before the rising of the sun, in that brief instant of time when night clouds are being cleared away and the first rays of light are streaking across the sky. Dayclean, we call this, when the day is new and the world is made fresh again.”	1
Bilali	“Most famous and powerful of all the Africans who lived on this island [Sapelo] during slavery”; wrote what’s believed to be the first Islamic text produced on American soil	1
Rice	Rice growing areas of Sierra Leone, Senegal, Liberia, discovered in 1700 by Europeans	2, 3,4
Cotton		2
Lima beans		2,
Okra		2,4
Sweet potatoes		2
Onions		4
Black pepper		4
Palmettos		6
Pines		6, 14, 21
Bays		6

Holly trees		6
Cypress tree		6
Giant live oaks with gray,		6

Spanish moss		
Resurrection ferns		6
Fever bush	“We didn’t have a doctor on the island, we never and had, and we still don’t so people took care of things themselves...There’s a plant here we call the feverbush because you make a tea out of it to lower your temperature, but that bush isn’t ready to pick until late summer.”	11
Beauty berry bush	“Papa went out and got some leaves from the beautyberry bush...Mama washed the leaves, mixed them with vinegar...to make the fever go down.”	11-12
Tobacco	Reynolds Tobacco	12
Church bell	“We rang the bell for everything then cause we didn’t have telephones.”	13
Garlic	“Pull up some garlic, pull up some garlic....crushed it up, and packed it in my nose...and I came around.”	15
Kerosene	“Kerosene lamps for light, because nobody on Sapelo who was black had electricity back then”	21

Stoop	“Front stoop on the outside of the house”	21
Wood stove, kitchen separate from house		22
Marsh grass	“I made grass baby dolls	25

	out of marsh grass like my grandmother and great-grandmother had done before me”	
Water	“Stay out of that water. Stay out of that water. Don’t go in that water. “	26
Tide	“We never planted when the tide was out.”	37
Sowing seeds	Young children, a pregnant woman	38
Lime	“Burning oyster shells”	38
Pecan trees	“Mama said nothing can fool a pecan tree so we watched the pecan trees and when they were putting out their blossoms, we knew it was safe to plant okra or anything else.”	38
Moon	New moon, full moon	38
Collard greens		40
Peanuts		40
Squash		40
Pumpkin		40
Red peas		40
Lima beans		40

Corn	“Used cornstalks for making potato banks, so that you could have sweetpotatoes”; “grits”; “meal”	41
Sweet potatoes	“Three plantings”	41
Sparkleberries	“Raccoon bluff”	44

Blackberries		44
House	Trees not planted near the house, “pink rosebush in the front and some saw palmettos and a piney willow tree”	64
Pennyroyal tea	“Herb we used for women’s problems that grows over here. That was all you got for childbirth most times.”	57
Life everlasting ( <i>Gnaphalium obtusifolium</i> )	Chest-rub made from the herb, along with whisky, lemon and turpentine were popular during the big influenza epidemic of 1941. The plant was also put into a pillow or smoked as an inhalant to treat asthma	78

## Integral role of gardens

"We plant like squash, snaps, and tomatoes and oka, and collard greens, and things like that. You grow the same things what they growing now, but you used to *grow it yourself* [...] *Everybody plant their own gardens*"

## Grieving racism, reclaiming Black futures

"You take the most of the people these days, they don't like to talk about the olden times--Some feel shame but then they don't know that that's history."

## Sapelo- a place of emersion

"We did not, the people in that community, Raccoon Bluff, did not run to the White man for everything. They did they stuff. They worked hard. Mind their own business in Raccoon Bluff."

## Black survival, sustenance farming

"And mos people worked for either Marion Martin, Reynolds, or Howard Coffin back then. " "Did anybody work for themselves?"

"No. Well, they aint nothing for you to do for yourself *but plant*."

## Sharing intergenerational knowledge

"You ain't gonna bring nothing...you ain't gonna carry a thing with you when you go. So you leave it with somebody else."





### Skin in the Game: Participant and behavioral observations



FIGURE 3.38: Rendered thesis response by Whitney Barr.

Working amongst the cane felt complicated and freeing. Some days, I felt a reconnection to my ancestors and considered the privilege of voluntarily harvesting the crop, just as the participants in the focus group shared. Figure 3.38 is a response piece to that hands-on experience. The yellow symbolizes hope. The running texture symbolizes me as the researcher. Often, I was reminded and encouraged by anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's memoir *Dust Tracks on a Road* and how she delved into and participated in the everyday experience of Black folks in Eatonville, FL.

The coolness of the Black body stands out as the vessel of strength that was forced to maintain plantation landscapes. Additionally, there is movement of the body, a reclamation of the body, in certain and ambiguous conflict with plantation futures.

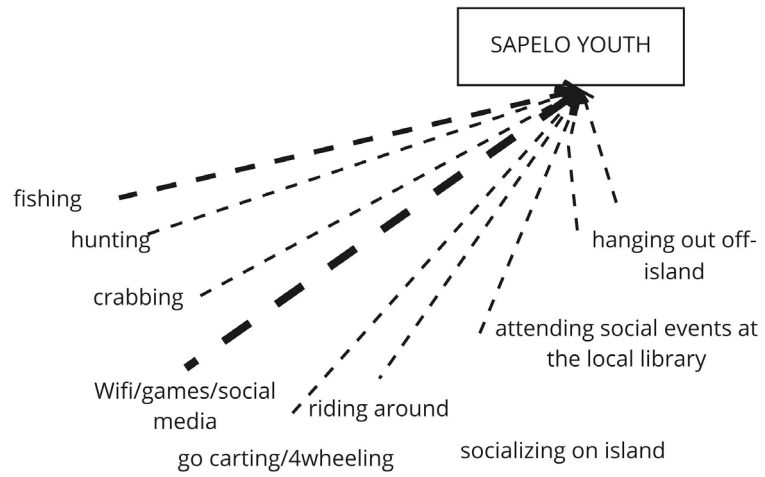


FIGURE 3.39. Sapelo youth losing interest in outdoor activities. Frequently expressed activities are shown with increased line weight.

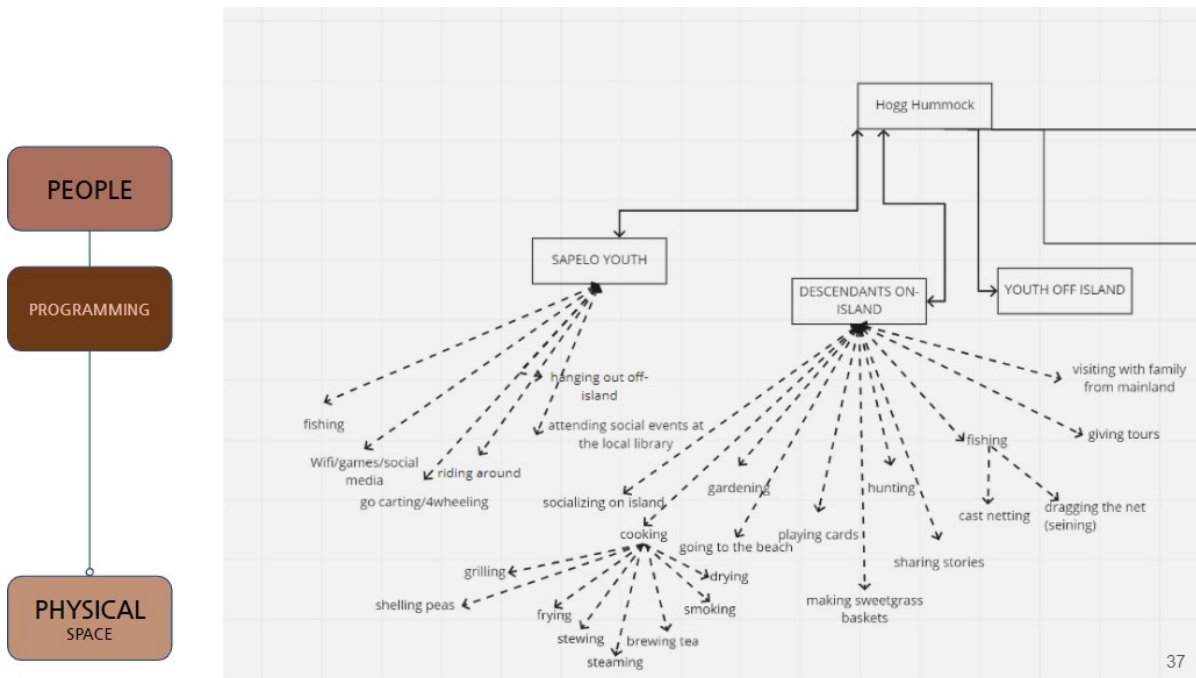


FIGURE 3.40: Taxonomy diagram of trending activities by Sapelo descendants.

In order to suggest realistic, relevant, and resilient program items for racial healing, I had to get personal and engage in the messiness of (re)learning, naming, and grieving racism within the plantation landscapes (Singh 2018).

## CHAPTER 4 SUGGESTED DESIGN SCENARIOS

Following Crazz’s approach to design ethnography, design scenarios focused on removing “constraints that the existing setting explicitly or implicitly imposed upon its users.” Throughout this specific thesis, space for racial healing within this island history of plantation landscapes was an implicit barrier and Lot 1 explicitly imposed planting, community engagement, and economic challenges for its intended future. Building off of Singh's racial healing design framework, design suggestions were created in the form of the following:

- **(Re)Learning-** Diasporic Planting Schedule and Conceptual Diagram
- **Unlearning and Reflection-** Programmatic Items and Scenario Conceptual Diagrams
- **Nourishment-** Land Reform Scenarios and Commercial Crop/Medicinal Herb Suggestions and Sales Forecasts

During the scenario development, iterative steps were taken to revisit taxonomic diagrams and observations (Chapter 3) in order to evaluate the relevance and sustainability of proposed programmatic items.

Lot 1 could potentially be a site for students, activists, growers, herbalists, farmers, and carpenters to learn Geechee land and cultural practices, led by the CWBUGA program, SOLO, and willing descendants who live on and off island. There is already a history of residents leading tours and sometimes these tours ask visitors to imagine the island’s past. Lot 1, if co-

developed alongside SOLO and SICARS, could become a place where people can physically (re)learn about diasporic Geechee crops and medicinal plants. They can (re)learn about the Geechee history of resisting the plantation landscape's attempt to erase African Diasporic relationships with vegetation and land. Replanting a biodiverse mix of culturally relevant trees, shrubs, edible crops, and medicinal plants can also return nutrients to the soil and physically demonstrate resistance to plantation monocultures and cash crops.

Additionally, starting with plant material is already a common step within the landscape design process. Thus, re(learning) diasporic crops and medicinal plants can challenge designers to deepen their plant relationships, participate in cultural preservation, and to consider the role of plant choice in promoting *inclusive* healing.

## **REALISTIC CONCEPTUAL PLANTING SCENARIOS**

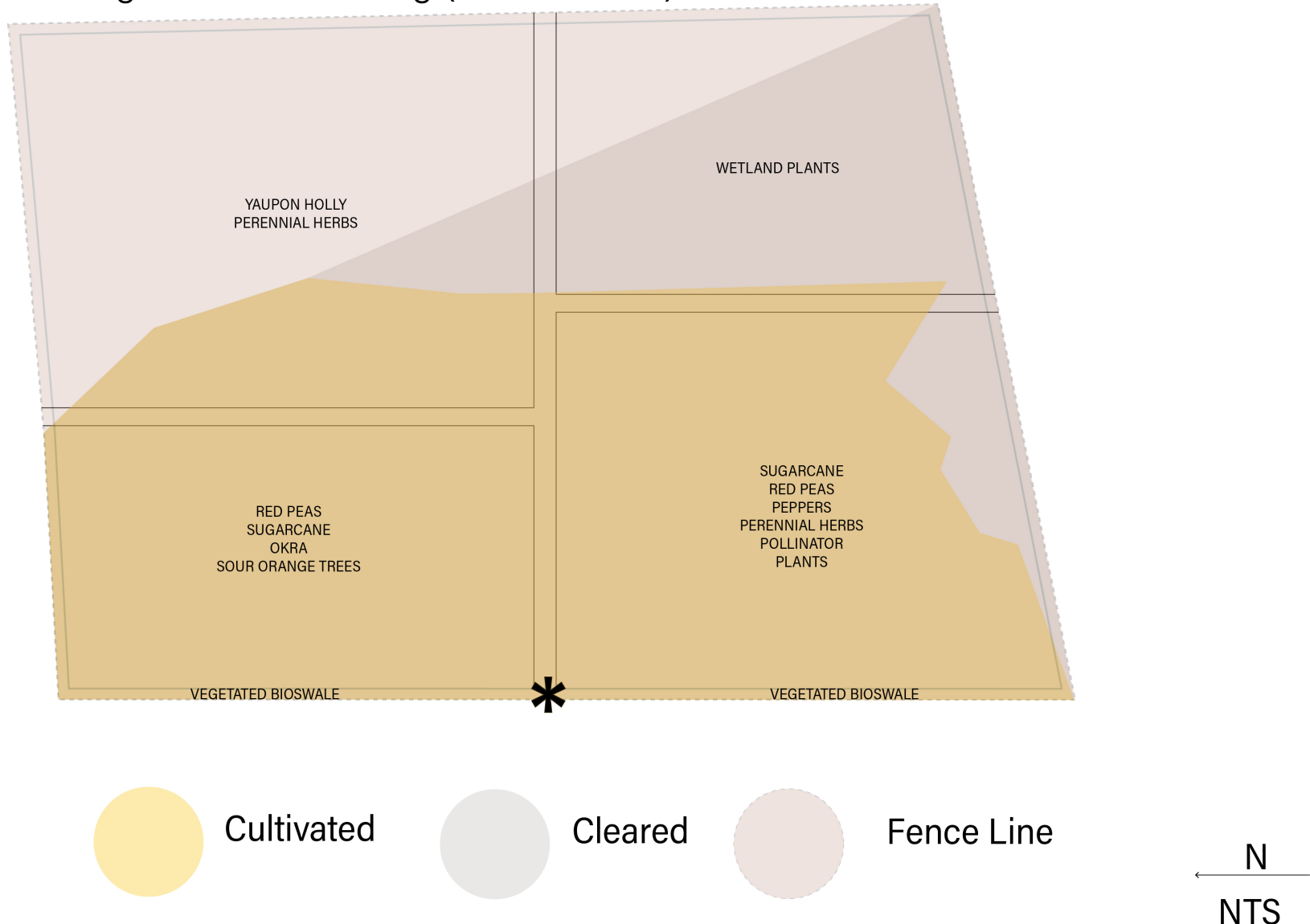
Witnessing the amount of labor physically exerted by the CWB program co-directors greatly influenced two planting design scenarios.

**In scenario 1: PLANTS + WEALTH BUILDING (NOURISH)**, all of Lot 1 is used for cultivation and yields are sold wholesale and/or directly to consumers. Crops could also be grown for sale to nearby (Black-owned) nurseries, farmers, and seed companies. This scenario may also show a growing base of Black farmers how they can be culture preservers through diasporic crop cultivation and seed saving. Farm revenues could be used to cover site expenses, labor, and the remainder could be co-shared by Geechee residents through SOLO and SICARS. With this scenario, Lot 1 would focus less on offering place-based healing and more on Black wealth building in the plantation future. Maximized plant growth could drive revenue from regional business-to-business (B2B) partnerships and direct-to-consumer pipelines.

Lot 1 would still be open to Geechee residents for harvesting and collecting

seeds/transplants for their own personal gardens. This scenario would require less day-to-day management. Given the lack of current resident traffic to Lot 1, this may be the most economically and socially sustainable solution (rather than implementing a *design and they will come* method). Also, some residents express a desire to be left alone and to not increase the traffic of outsiders. Based on data collected, it is possible that the plantation is still too traumatic for “cultivating” joy and if so, the optimal racial healing will come from preserving the diasporic vegetation and reinvesting in the descendants of enslaved Africans who helped build this island and this country’s economy.

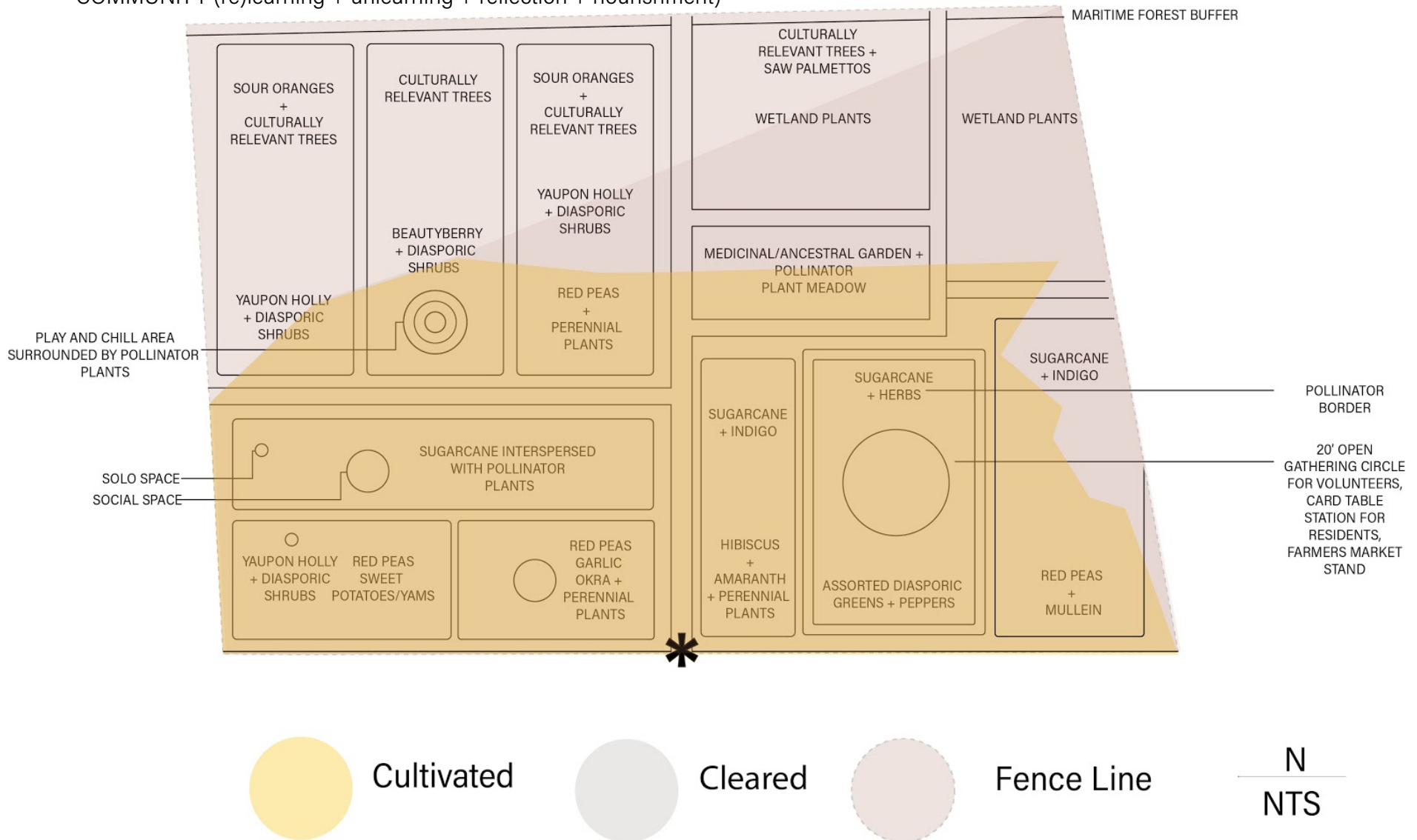
FIGURE 4.1 : SCENARIO 1 - RACIAL HEALING THROUGH PLANTS  
(re)learning + wealth building (nourishment)



This rectilinear form prioritizes crop cultivation, seedsaving, and wealth building through the agricultural landscape. While technically open to the public, this site mainly serves as an example of unlearning and relearning through its land practices. With this form, higher crop and medicinal plant yields can be expected, resulting in more revenue to return to the Geechee community. This suggested circulation aligns with the existing organic movement through the site. The 8' paths prioritize navigation between planting areas.

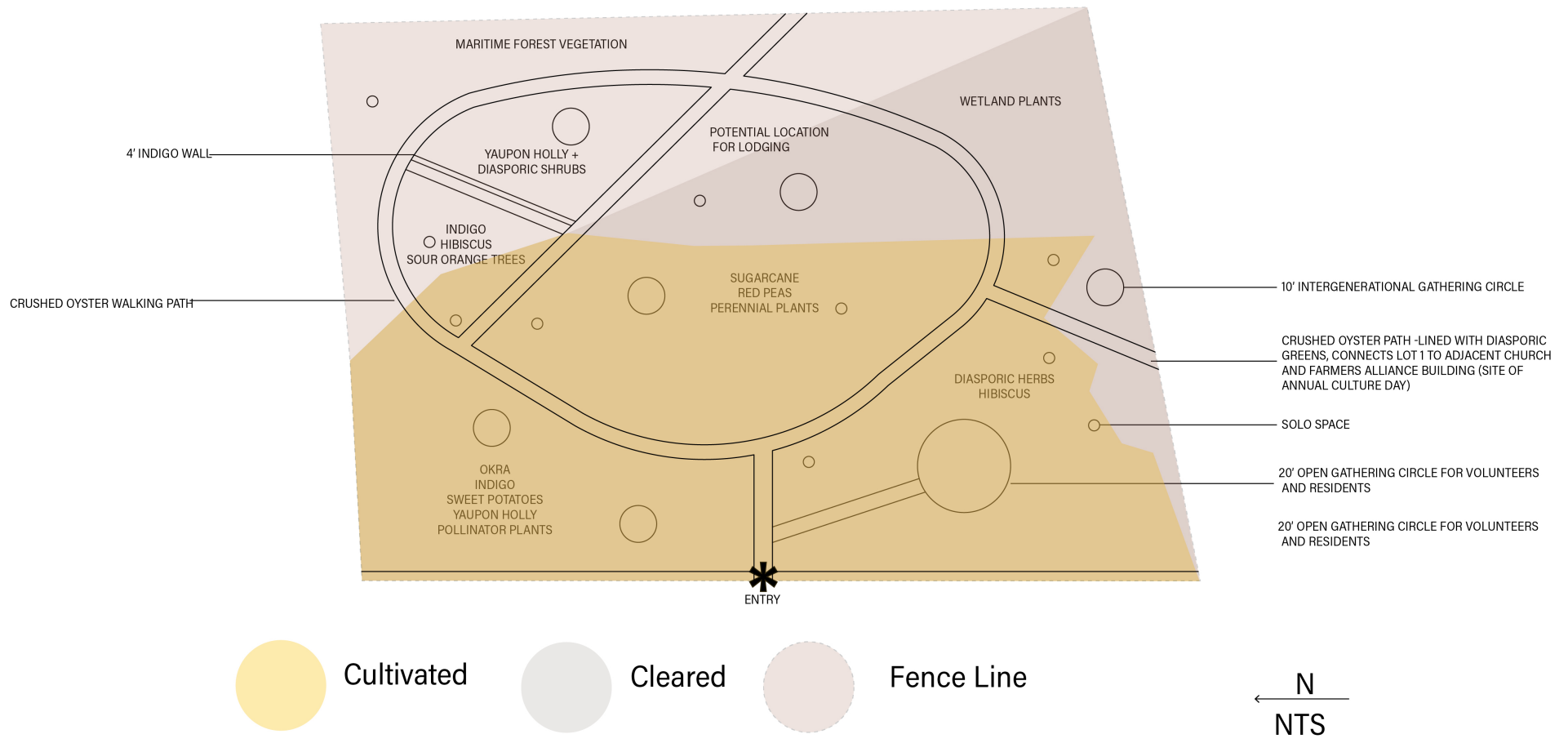
**In scenario 2: PLANTS AND COMMUNITY**, Lot 1 gradually expands cultivation based on resident interest and feedback. Residents can organically grow in plots on Lot 1, subdivided by families, and assert their identity into the landscape through plant selection. Additionally, programmatic items such as areas of rest and community, will complement the plants and offer a new third space experience for descendants and visitors. Some plants will be familiar to descendants and others will be new. This plant diversity can help support dialogue and nonjudgmental curiosity about racial healing. For example, on a summer Sunday, youth may engage with Life Everlasting's yellow flowers, sip its tea, and learn about its Geechee uses from descendant women who can easily walk over to Lot 1 after church service. Pollinator-friendly plants may draw in traffic from East Perimeter and lead to beekeeping onsite. Considering expressed preferences by some descendants, raised beds are highly recommended for greater use, ease of volunteer training, and ease of use by seniors. In this scenario, Lot 1 is an intergenerational and multi-use plantation future for racial healing.

FIGURE 4.2: SCENARIO 2 - RACIAL HEALING THROUGH DIASPORIC PLANTS + COMMUNITY (re)learning + unlearning + reflection + nourishment)



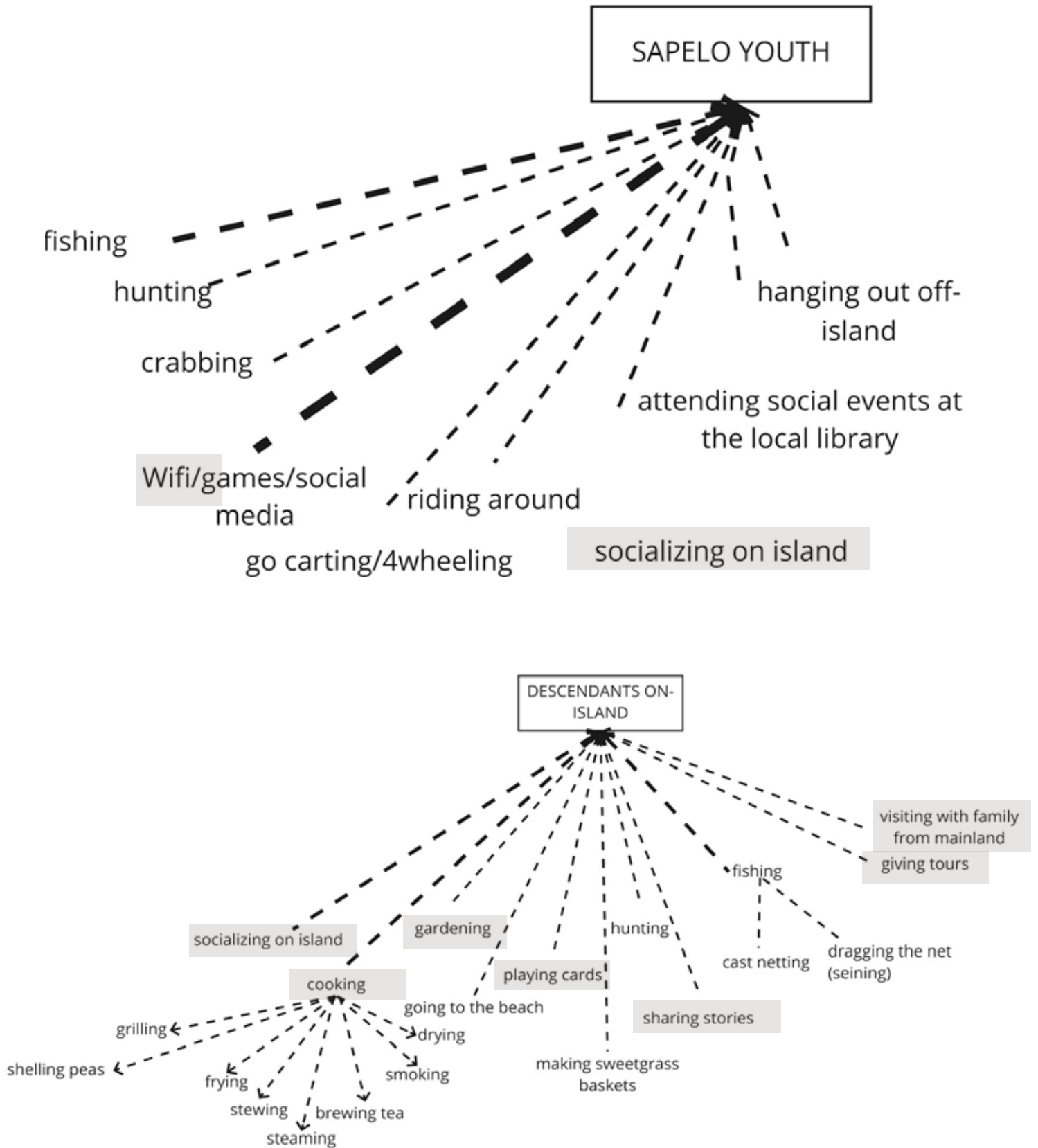
This rectilinear form offers space for place-based experiences and prioritizes crop cultivation. This suggested form could be incrementally implemented into the site by the existing UGA CWB/SOLO team with the support of volunteers.

FIGURE 4.3: SCENARIO 3- RACIAL HEALING THROUGH DIASPORIC PLANTS + COMMUNITY (re)learning + unlearning + reflection + nourishment)



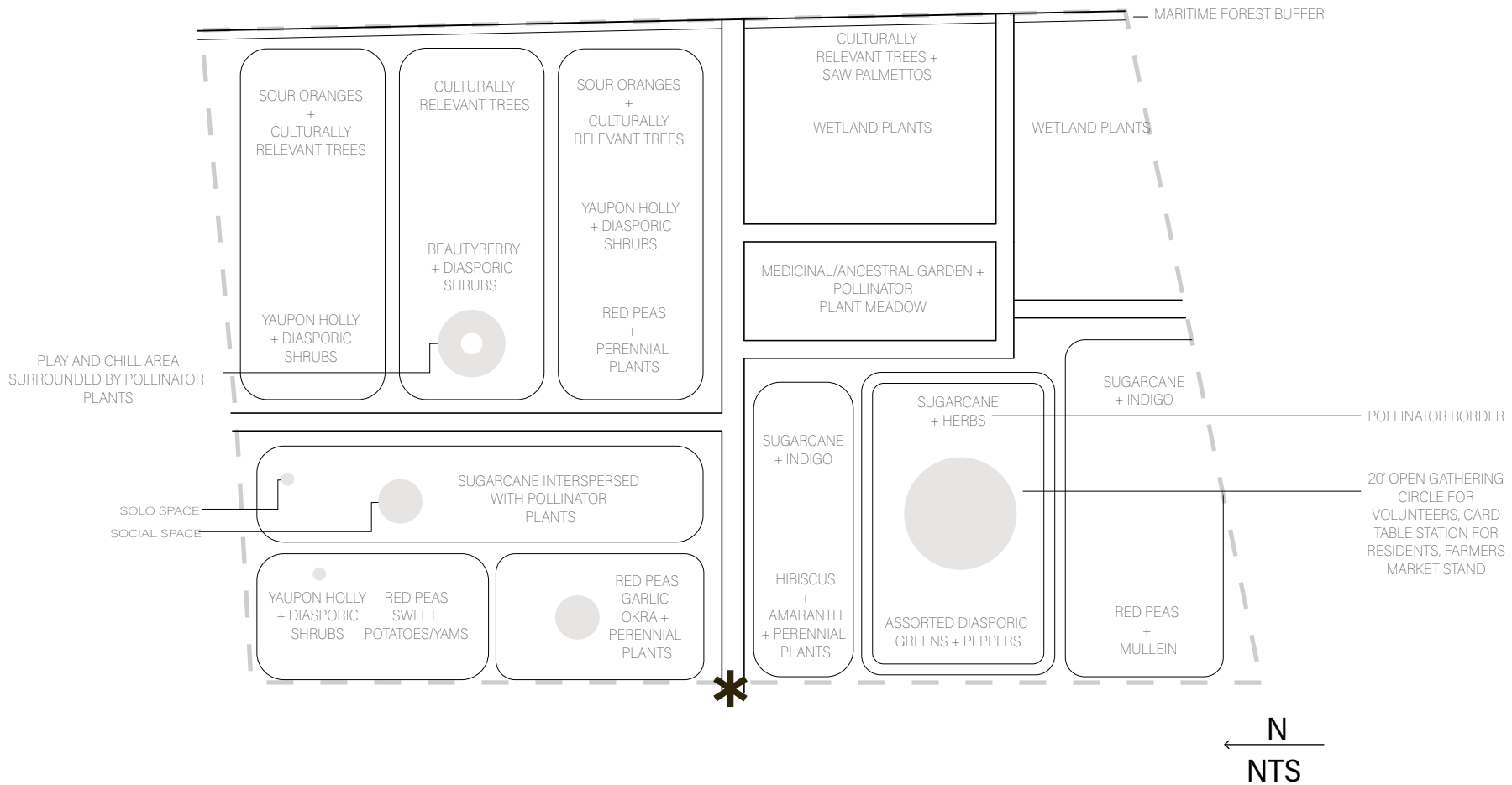
This arc and tangent form prioritizes space for relearning, unlearning, reflection, and nourishment. Social and solo gathering spaces (circles) disrupt the flow of a traditional plantation landscape and encourage visitors and residents to experience nonjudgmental curiosity, reflection, and nourishment. 8' wide paths prioritize strolling amongst planting and human-focused areas.

FIGURE 4.4: TRANSLATING GEECHEE DESCENDANT CULTURAL ACTIVITIES INTO PHYSICAL DESIGN SUGGESTIONS



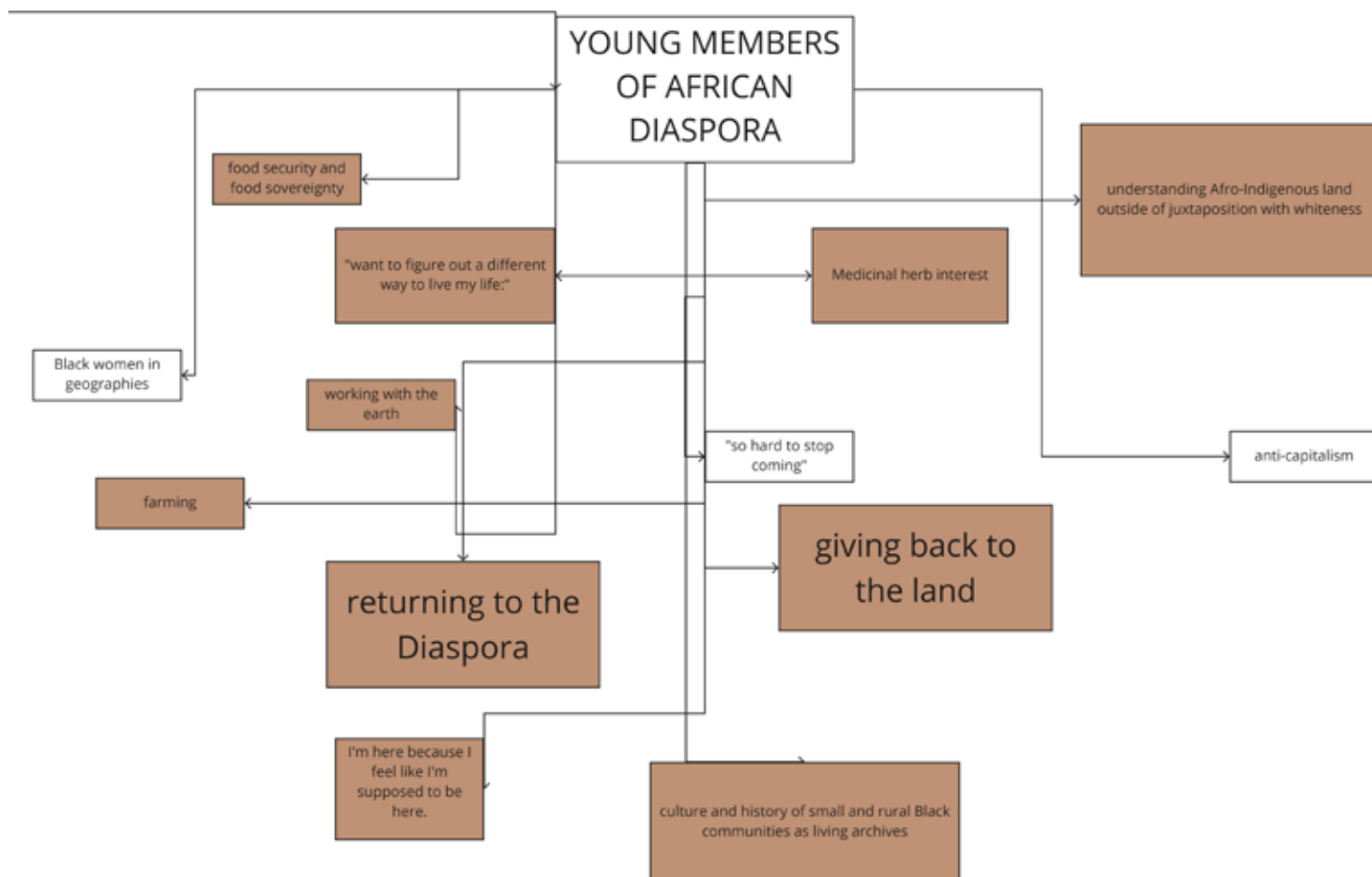
Ethnographic design approach: After action and value coding, both observed and communicated activities of interest were incorporated into site design scenarios as much as possible.

FIGURE 4.5: TRANSLATING DESCENDANT ACTIVITIES AND VALUES INTO PLANTATION  
FUTURE DESIGN SUGGESTIONS



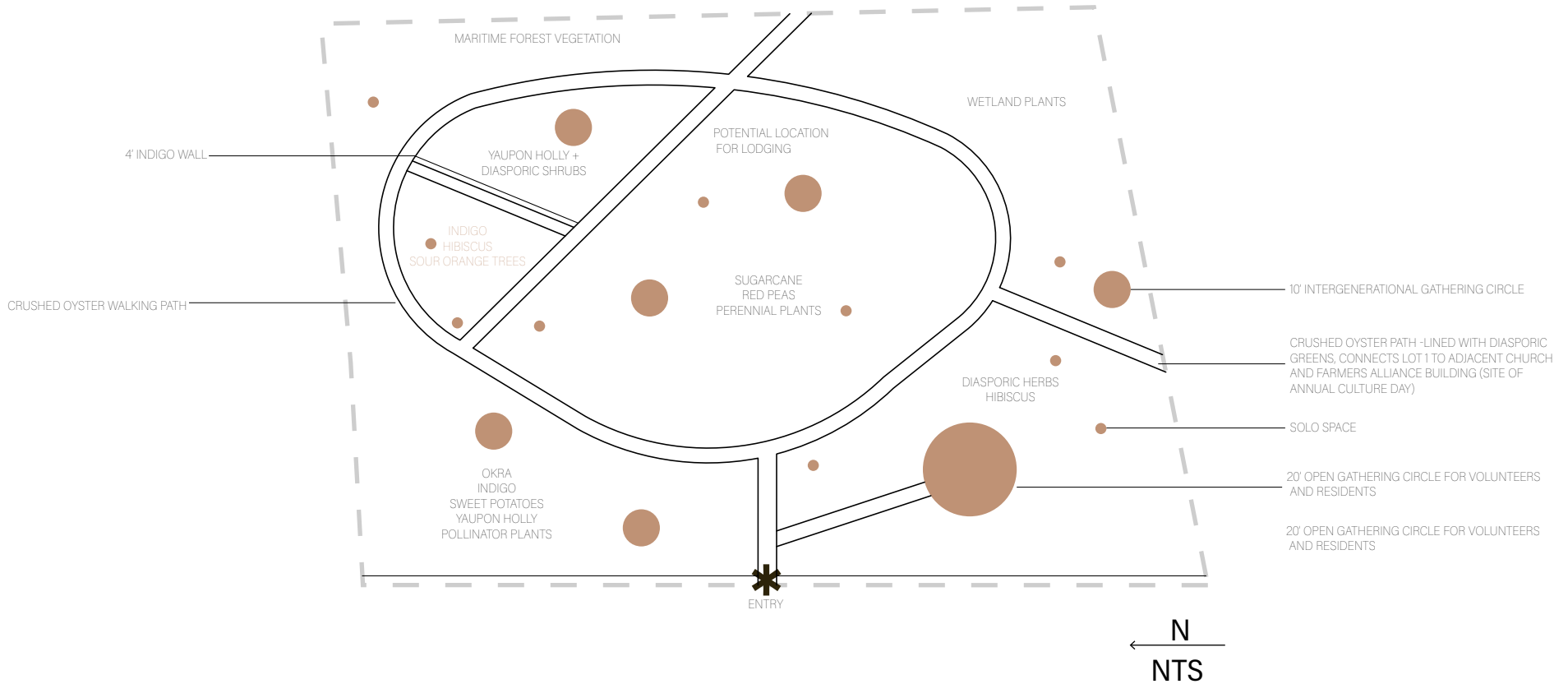
This rectilinear form offers space for place-based experiences and prioritizes crop cultivation. This suggested form could be incrementally implemented into the site by the existing UGA CWB/SOLO team with the support of volunteers. Though this design is minimalist in form, it realistically supports the CWB/SOLO team goals of driving economic development through diasporic crop cultivation. Additionally, this form can be adapted at other sites on and off island.

FIGURE 4.6: TRANSLATING VISITOR ACTIVITIES AND VALUES INTO PHYSICAL DESIGN SUGGESTIONS



Ethnographic design approach: After action and value coding, both observed and communicated activities of interest were incorporated into site design scenarios as much as possible.

FIGURE 4.7: TRANSLATING VISITOR ACTIVITIES AND VALUES INTO PLANTATION  
FUTURE DESIGN SUGGESTIONS



This arc and tangent form prioritizes space for relearning, unlearning, reflection, and nourishment. Social and solo gathering spaces (circles) disrupt the flow of a traditional plantation landscape and encourage visitors and residents to experience nonjudgmental curiosity, reflection, and nourishment. 8' paths prioritize navigation between planting and human-focused areas.

This scenario stretches beyond increased yields to embracing food and agricultural diversity within the African Diaspora. Historically, the plantation landscape defined Blackness as labor and Black bodies as dispensable. Through this form, existing Black land relationships are highlighted through crop/plant selection and space is offered for organizing, resting, and reflecting. In order to be implemented, more community buy-in and engagement is necessary. Multi-use options of the site allow for job creation and an increased sense of safe gathering amongst members of the African Diaspora.



FIGURE 4.8: Aerial view of users engaging within medicinal herbs and pollinator friendly plants. The vegetation softly hugs the woman (highlighted by the sun) while she strolls and stops to engage with the plants at her leisure. The Sapelo sun kisses her melanin skin and she does not worry about racial surveillance while harvesting. If she feels ill, she also feels comfortable and knowledgeable of the herbs that can help support her healing. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.

The suggested planting tables below are a thoughtful culmination of Diasporic crops and medicinal plants that were:

- Specifically requested from Geechee descendants and salt tolerant
- Of interest to focus group participants
- Successfully grown or growing on Sapelo Island or West Africa
- Historically grown or used by enslaved Africans and/or Geechee descendants
- Identified on island as a rich source of habitat and/or nectar for pollinators

## DESIGN SUGGESTIONS FOR (RE)LEARNING

During Spalding's time, the following were planted within the plantation system:

- *Saccharum officinarum* (Purple ribbon sugarcane)\*
- *Gossypium barbadense* (Sea Island Cotton)
- *Indigofera suffruticosa* (Indigo)\*
- *Cinnamom camphora* (Camphor tree)\*
- *Populus alba* (White poplar tree)
- *Phoenix spp.* (Date tree)
- *Wisteria sinensis* (Chinese wisteria)\*
- *Rosa laevigata* (Cherokee rose)\*
- *Cynodon dactylon* (Bermuda grass)\*
- *Morus rubra* (Red mulberry)
- *Cudrania tricuspidata* (Mandarin melon berry)
- *Vitis spp.*(Grapes)
- *Olea spp.* (Olives)
- *Yucca aloifolia* (Spanish bayonets)\*
- *Diospyros virginiana* (Persimmon)\*
- Physically identified on island by researcher

Since the sugarcane, indigo, and sour oranges were requested by descendants and some still grow their own sugarcane, these crops are included within the planting scenarios.

### TABLE 4.1: CULTURALLY RELEVANT TREES

Botanical Name	Common Name(s)	Historical/Cultural Significance	Height	Spacing	Spread
<i>Citrus aurantium</i>	Sour Orange/Bitter Orange	Introduced by French, requested and currently grown near Reynolds Mansion and by a Geechee descendant on island	10'-30'	15' apart, rows spaced at 20'	8'-20'
<i>Citrus maxima Merr</i>	Pomelo/White grapefruit	Currently grown by a Geechee descendant on island	20'-43'	10'-15'	8'-10'
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	Eastern Red Cedar	tea made by Yamasee Nation and Geechee descendants; ecological value	16'-66'	6'-10'	8'-20'
<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>	Magnolia	respiratory tea historically made by Geechee descendants, ecological/aesthetic value	70'	15'-20'	20'-40'
<i>Melaleuca viminalis</i>	Weeping Red Bottlebrush	Grows in front of SICARS white building	8'-10'	4'-9'	8'-10'

<i>Moringa oleifera</i>	Moringa tree	indigenous to Kenya and Ethiopia	32'-40'	10'	15'-25'
<i>Musa acuminata</i> × <i>balbisiana</i> 'Blue Java'	Blue Java banana tree	Banana trees grown at local Sapelo store and some residents	10'-15'	5'-6'	8'-10'
<i>Pinus palustris</i>	Longleaf Pine	Found on Lot 1	60'-120'	8'	30'-40'

<i>Pinus taeda</i>	Loblolly Pine	Found on Lot 1	40'-90'	14'	3'
<i>Quercus virginiana</i>	Live Oak***	Found across island (and on Lot1), place of refuge	40'-80'	40'	60'-100'
<i>Sabal palmetto</i>	Cabbage Palmetto	Common on Georgia/South Carolina coastline	up to 60'	5'-10'	10'-15'

\*\*\**Tillandsia usneoides* (Spanish moss) will likely grow on live oak trees



**FIGURE 4.9:** View of sour orange orchard and Save Our Land Ourselves (SOLO) yoga and relaxation site. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.

TABLE 4.2: DIASPORIC SHRUBS

Botanical Name	Common Name(s)	Historical/Cultural Significance	Height	Spacing	Spread
<i>Callicarpa americana</i>	Beautyberry	Mentioned often throughout Cornelia Bailey Walker's memoir, used for fever reduction	4'-6'	3'-4'	4'-6'
<i>Callicarpa americana L.</i>	Beautyberry	Tea, jelly	3'-6'	4'-6'	3'-6'
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	Yaupon Holly	tea	5'-10'	4'-8'	8'-10'
<i>Illicium floridanum</i>	Anise Shrub	tea	6'-10'	6'-8'	4'-6'

<i>Indigofera suffruticosa</i>	Indigo	dye, ecological value (nitrogen fixer)	3'-5'	2'-4'	2'-3'
<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	Bay Laurel	Bay leaves for cooking Geechee cuisine	15'-20'	15'-20'	20'
<i>Morella cerifera</i>	Wax Myrtle	ecological value	15'-20'	8'-10'	8'-10'
<i>Morella cerifera</i>	Southern Wax Myrtle	Mentioned often throughout Cornelia Bailey Walker's memoir	10'-15'	8'-10'	8'-10'

<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elderberry	Geechee use for tea, jelly	8'-20'	rows 5' apart, shrubs 15' apart	8'-20'
<i>Serenoa repens</i>	Saw Palmetto	Used for basket making, common on Georgia/South Carolina coastline ecological value, contribute to placekeeping	5'-10'	3'-5'	4'-10'
<i>Vaccinium arboreum</i>	Sparkleberry	Important source of food for many maritime forest animals	2'-15', but can reach 25'	6'-8'	4'

TABLE 4.3: EDIBLE DIASPORIC CROPS

Botanical Name	Common Name(s)	Historical/Cultural Significance	Height	Spacing	Spread
<i>Vigna unguiculata</i> var. <i>Sapelo red pea</i>	Sapelo Red Pea	Preserved Sapelo red pea that likely originates from Sierra Leone according to Bailey and other Geechee descendants. grown by many descendants on island, ecological value (nitrogen fixer)	1'-3'	.5'-1'	1'
<i>Abelmoschus esculentus</i> var. <i>burgundy okra</i>	Burgundy okra (gombo), Lady's fingers, Ethiopian Red Okra	Saved by CWB and given to UGA's Center for Research and Education at Wormsloe, Used to treat gastritis and gastric ulcers; slimy interior used for abortion; word okra comes from okuru in the Igbo language of Nigeria	3' - 5'	1'-1.5'	2'-3'

<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>	Cowpea, Field Pea, Black Eyed Pea	Likely originated from Ghana, grown in central Alabama as early as 1670, and soon spread to the Cherokee; planted for human + livestock consumption, used in a	1'-3'	.5'-1'	1'
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		popular Geechee dish called Hoppin Johns, source of protein for enslaved persons			
<i>Amaranthus spp</i>	Amaranth, callaloo	Afro-Indigenous- Caribbean origin, high nutritional value, commonly grown with peas and corn; leaf vegetable and seed (glutenfree)	4'-6'	1.5'-3'	3'-4'
<i>Sesamum indicum</i>	Benne, Modern-day sesame seeds	Used to thicken soups, first used by enslaved West Africans then adopted by colonizers as a rotational crop in rice plantations due to crop's ability to improve soil quality; used to add fats/proteins to diet; native to Sub Saharan Africa, cultivated in India, believed to bring good luck	1'-3'	1.5'-2'	.5'-1.5'
<i>Hibiscus sabdariffa and H. acetosella</i>	(Jamaican) Sorrel, hibiscus, roselle	Lowers blood pressure, introduced to US from descendants of Senegambia and Guinea-Bissau, distributed throughout Caribbean; in spiritual medicine, known as Aphrodisiac	3'-8'	3'-5'	2'-4'

<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>	Ribbon Sugarcane	Geechee use, Sapelo Island was the birthplace of commercial sugar production in the U.S. (by enslaver/colonizer Spalding in 1805 or 1806); <a href="#">Cornelia Walker Bailey</a> : “Two hundred years ago, we planted sugarcane here out of necessity. We weren’t given a choice. Now we’re going to plant it because we have a choice.”	12’-15’	3’-5’	4’
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		W.African by way of Barbados according to Spalding's 1828 <i>Southern Agriculturalist</i> contributions			
<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>	Sweet Potatoes	Geechee use, high nutritional value, high yield, ecological value	.5’-2’	8’-10’	3’-6’
<i>Dioscorea rotundata</i>	White Guinea Yam, nyami (Fulani word meaning to eat)	Brought over on slave ships, largely used to cheaply feed enslaved persons during middle passage, native to West Africa, used for food purposes	3’-4’	4’	1’ apart, rows 3’-5’ apart
<i>Cucurbita mixta</i>	Green striped cushaw pumpkin	Domesticated by Native Americans, later introduced to enslaved Africans	.75’ to 1.5’	1.5’-3’	3’-4’

<i>Brassica rapa subsp. rapa</i>	Turnips	Supposedly, enslavers would reserve the turnip roots for themselves, leaving the leaves for enslaved Africans. As Western African cuisine traditionally utilizes a wide variety of green leaves in its cooking, turnip greens as a substitute	1'	1'-1.5'	1'-3'
<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	Green Glaze Collard Greens	18th century, Originated in Europe but became a source of food and nutrition for enslaved persons; considered sweetest post frost	1'	1'-2'	1'
<i>Allium tricoccum</i>	Wild Onion/Ramp	Seasoning, colds, fevers	.75'-1'	1.5'	0.5'- 1'
<i>Allium cepa</i>	Garlic	Used to treat snake bites, Seasoning, anti-inflammatory	1'- 1.5'	4'-6'	0.5'- 1'

<i>Allium sativum</i>	Garlic	Used to treat snake bites, stop bleeding; seasoning, anti-inflammatory	1'- 2'	4'-6'	6"
<i>Asarum caudatum</i>	Western wild ginger	Quick growing ground cover in shady place, increasing sexual desire, treating headaches	0.5'	6"-8"	1'-2'
<i>Capsicum annum</i>	Fish pepper	Developed in Caribbean; became secret ingredient for crab and oyster dishes	2'	1'-2'	1'

<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	Buena Malata pepper	Afro-Indigenous- Caribbean origin, request from Geechee descendant for added value product production (hot sauce)	2'	1'-2'	1'
<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	Paprika pepper	Geechee use (spice)	2'	1'-2'	1'
<i>Arachis hypogaea</i>	Peanut, guba, groundnut	Historically grown Geechee crop, ecological value (nitrogen fixer)	1.5'	1.5'	.5'-1'

**TABLE 4.4: DIASPORIC, ANNUAL/PERENNIALS/BIENNIAL MEDICINAL PLANTS/HERBS**

Botanical Name	Common Name(s)	Historical/Cultural Significance	Height	Spacing	Spread
<i>Verbascum Thapsus</i>	Mullein	Tea used by Geechee descendants, medicinal plant currently in high demand since COVID-19 pandemic due to immune boosting properties	5'-10'	10"-12"	10"-12"
<i>Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium</i>	(Sweet) Life Everlasting/ Rabbit Tobacco	Tea, tincture used by Geechee descendants and Muslims	.5'-2.5'	1' - 1.5'	1'
<i>Mentha piperita</i> , <i>Mentha longifolia</i> (wild mint native to Africa)	Mint	Tea used by Geechee descendants; aids digestion, reduce fever, relieve menstrual cramps, diarrhea; in spiritual	1' - 1.5'	1' - 1.5'	1'-2'

		medicine, used to revive hope and restore energy			
<i>Hyssop officinalis</i>	Hyssop	Used for colds/asthma, spiritual cleansing of mind and body, successfully grown on island	2'	3'	1'-2'
<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i>	Holy Basil	tea, medicinal plant currently in high demand, successfully grown on island	1'-2.5'	2'	2'
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	St. John's Wort	tea, medicinal plant currently in high demand	1'-2.5'	2'	2'
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover	Groundcover/cover crop, women's health tea	.5'-1.5'	dcover/covercrop)	
<i>Leonurus cardiaca</i>	Motherwort	tea, medicinal plant currently in high demand	2'-4'	1'	2'
<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	Lemon balm	tea, medicinal plant currently in high demand	1'-2.5'	2'	2'
<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Echinacea	tea, ecological value	1'-1.5'	2'	2'
<i>Solidago rugosa</i>	Goldenrod	Commonly found on island, Tea for Bladder issues, antiseptic, skin issues	1'-3'	1'	1'-1.5'
<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	Thyme	herb used by Geechee descendants	1'-2.5'	2'	2'

<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> and <i>O. gratissimum</i>	Basil	Seasoning, women's health, anti-inflammatory, treating anxiety, curing headaches	1.5'-2'	2'	2'
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<i>Cnidocolus stimulosus</i>	Stinging nettle	tea, medicinal plant currently in high demand	2'-3'	1'-1.5'	.75'-1'
<i>Aframomum melegueta</i>	Grains of Paradise, melegueta pepper	spice used by Geechee descendants	2'-3'	1'-2'	1'
<i>Limonium carolinianum</i>	Sea Lavender	Used for calming benefits, antiseptic; used to attract love in spiritual medicine, psychic dream promoter	.5'-1.5'	1'	1'-2'
<i>Muhlenbergia filipes</i>	Sweetgrass	Sweetgrass baskets made by enslaved Africans (including Geechee descendants), used for human/animal bedding during Middle passage, found on dunes/coastal areas	2'	2'-4'	2'-4'

**TABLE 4.5: POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY VEGETATION**

<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Common Name(s)</b>	<b>Historical/Cultural Significance</b>	<b>Height</b>	<b>Spacing</b>	<b>Spread</b>
<i>Rhexia Nashii</i>	Maid marian, meadow beauty	Commonly found in open fields on island and at Lot 1	1'-5'	1'-1.5'	n/a
<i>Liatris spp.</i>	Blazing Star	Tea made by Geechee descendants, women's health, found in open fields on island	1'-3'	1'-1.5'	n/a
<i>Hydrocotyle bonariensis</i>	Pennywort	Tea made by Geechee descendants, women's health	.5'-1'	1'-1.5'	n/a
<i>Asclepias lanceolata</i>	Fewflower Milkweed, Few-flower Milkweed, Red Milkweed	Commonly found on island	3'-5'	1'-1.5'	1'-2'

**USING RESEARCHER PRIVILEGE**

While red peas are a key crop to plant, involved researchers can use their privileged access to USDA's Germplasm Repository to request biodiverse seeds that may be connected to Sapelo and/or the larger Afro-Indigenous Diaspora.

Other seed sources include:

- Cocoa and Seed
- I Grow Shit
- Indigenous Seed Initiatives
- True Love Seeds

- Seed Mail Co.
- Etsy (individual seed savers)
- The Mom in Me
- Melanated Organic Seeds
- Ivy Leaf Farms Seeds

## **DESIGN SUGGESTIONS FOR UNLEARNING RACISM**

*Focused on community led tours, wayfinding, and regenerative ag practices*

### **CREATE A WELCOMING AND RACIALLY INCLUSIVE ENTRY**

Many descendants shared that they were unaware of the activity at Lot 1. During my time on island, I saw only a few descendants at Lot 1. While design alone cannot solve this island tension, a more people-focused entry can help descendants feel that this is *their* space rather than an intrusion. A more welcoming entry also can help support volunteer awareness of and navigation to the site. Below are some physical suggestions that may enhance the entry:

- Include flags of Sierra Leone, Gullah Geechee National Corridor, Yamacraw Island, and Sapelo Island for diasporic representation. Considering the racial tension between UGA, Georgia DNR, and Geechee descendants, anti-racist language such as Black Lives Matter within the signage may also help.
- Focus on connecting the vertical and ground plane. Use color within a “street” mural or stark white oyster shells. Plants such as life everlasting, yaupon holly, goldenrod, and blazing star can soften the edges of entry.

Use QR codes to connect with SICARS and SOLO-owned webpages that may include audio

from descendants and archival information from the Geechee perspective. This feature may help increase connectivity to the Geechee community, support their organization goals, and direct people to purchase crops/herbs. Also, this digital version of the landscape increases accessibility and site awareness.

## **IMPLEMENT A COMPOSTING PLAN**

**Import compost into Lot 1.** After consulting with a DNR official, compost can be transported to the site through a state-owned barge. Incremental loads of compost can be included in empty bins for no cost and delivered to a dock. A standard dump truck can hold 10-14 cubic yards so at this rate it would take 10-13 trips to just deliver the compost to Lot 1. This helps save costs but will take too much time. A barge can be requested for approximately \$4000 to transport 134 cubic yards of compost at 1 in depth. While costly, a crowd sharing fund (such as GoFundMe) or a grant could help cover this necessary expense. Given the growing interest in Sapelo's Geechee land initiatives, funds could be raised quickly.

**Put infrastructure in place for composting** at Lot 1 for residents and visitors to use. A mutual aid system of produce in exchange for composting may support the ongoing need for compost and alleviate the need for another barge delivery. Many residents currently compost or toss out food scraps so this would align with current behaviors. Additionally, **include an area for cleaning fish** for folks coming from Cabrera Beach, north of Lot 1. This can be used for fish emollient in the soil.

## ***EMBRACE LOW-TILL PRACTICES AND RAISED BEDS***

This action prioritizes soil health, decreases soil and nitrogen loss, and if practiced

consistently, lessens the use of human labor and machinery. Conventional plantation methods often exploited Black and animal labor for excessive tilling. In support of universal design, include raised beds. Per the suggestion of co-director M.Bailey, the beds also support ease of use for volunteers. Sometimes volunteers look out at the immense field and can feel overwhelmed. Additionally, this raised bed concept could be used by Geechee descendants who expressed a preference to engage in tourism and/or food entrepreneurship through their own property.



FIGURE 4.10: Within this proposed design of Geechee-co-owned raised beds (waist high for senior accessibility and storm resiliency), Geechee men and women can return to playing spades in a (new) third space while enjoying the shade of the cabbage palm tree. Families may also use this site as part of their tours or for culinary/medicinal herbs. On a large event day, such as Culture Day, kids can join in and paint the concrete platform. The selected shades of green are inspired by the marsh grass (*Spartina*) and the form is inspired by Geechee artist Jonathan Green. This design could also be replicated on a privately owned Geechee property. Design and

rendering by Whitney Barr.

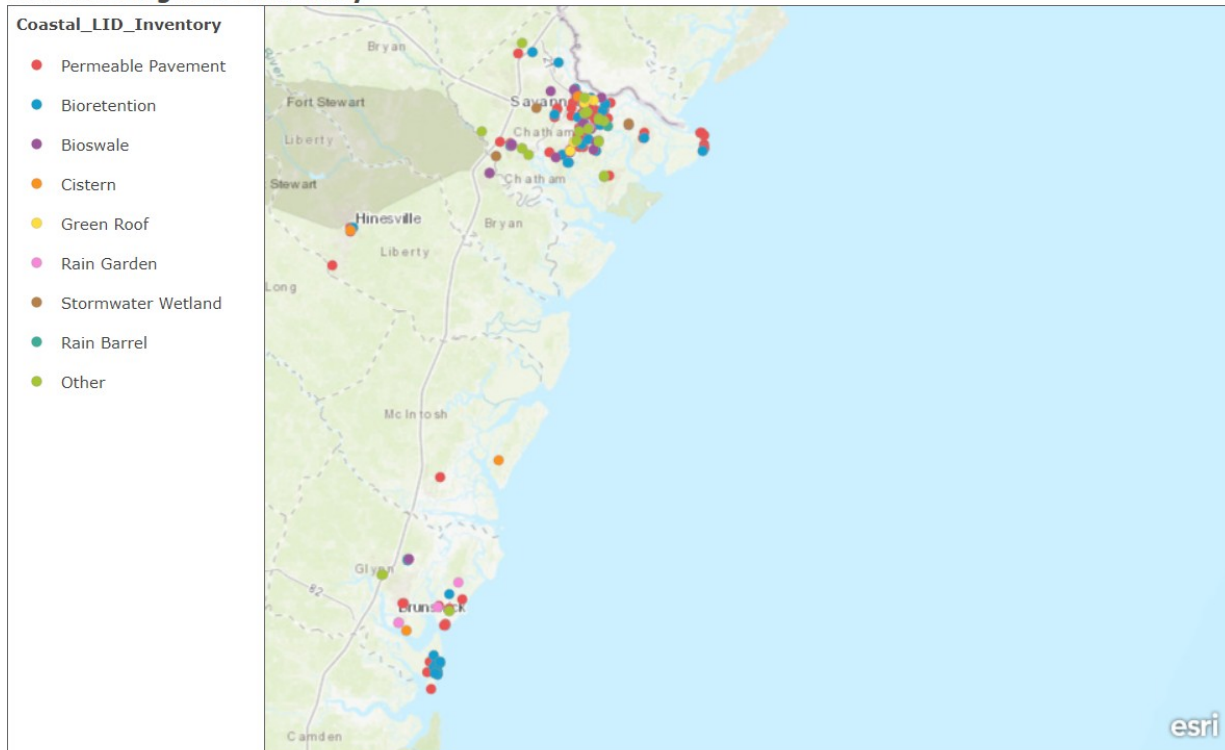
### ***INCORPORATE RIPARIAN BUFFERS***

*A riparian buffer* is often called a windbreak in agriculture and planting shrubs and trees can help slow wind velocity before reaching the sandy-sandy loam soil. This could help mitigate soil erosion into the surrounding ditches at lot 1. Since there is a growing interest in expanding lot 1, incorporating riparian buffers can be a physical design approach for plantation futures.

According to Coastal Georgia's Low Impact Development Inventory, most coastal Georgia stormwater management design has been implemented in Chatham County and not McIntosh County. Given Sapelo's ecological vulnerability and Lot 1's elevation within the Hog Hammock community, permeable pavement (crushed oysters), cisterns, rain gardens, and bioswales should be included within this agricultural landscape.

Unlike the plantation landscape, Lot 1 can and should add value and not ecological harm, in the form of soil erosion or pollutant runoff, to the surrounding areas. Preserving stormwater can also defray costs and be an educational resource. Additionally, wetland-friendly plants can help slow infiltration, lessen ponding water after storm events, and support site irrigation. Lot 1's quartz sand has a low water holding capacity so compost should be added to increase water and nutrient retention.

### Coastal Georgia LID Inventory



Inventory of Low Impact Developments implemented along the the Georgia Coast.

Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, USGS, NGA, EPA, NPS

FIGURE 4.11: Source: [Georgia Department of Natural Resources](#) Viewed 16 March

2021.

TABLE 4.6: WETLAND FRIENDLY PLANTS

Botanical Name	Common Name(s)	Historical/Cultural Significance	Height	Spacing	Spread
<i>Carex cherokeensis</i>	Cherokee Sedge		2'	1' apart, rows 3' apart	2'-4'
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Cattail	Commonly found across island, ecological value, historically eaten by Yemassee peoples and Geechee descendants	2'-6'	n/a	2'

#### RAIN GARDEN VEGETATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pink Muhly Grass - *Muhlenbergia capillaris*
- White cloud muhly grass - *Muhlenbergia capillaris* 'White Cloud'
- Toothache Grass - *Ctenium aromaticum*
- Blue Rush - *Juncus inflexus* 'Blue Arrows'
- Coastal Joe Pye - *Eupatoriadelphus dubius*
- Black-eyed Susan - *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldstrum'
- Swamp Sunflower - *Helianthus angustifolius*
- Sweet Goldenrod - *Solidago odora*
- Swamp Milkweed - *Asclepias incarnata*
- Crimson eyed Rosemallow - *Hibiscus moscheutos*
- Purple Lobelia - *Lobelia elongata*

## **SHADE FRIENDLY WETLAND PLANTS**

- Southern Shield fern - *Thelypteris kunthii*
- Sensitive Fern - *Onoclea sensibilis*
- Cinnamon Fern - *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*
- Groundcover - Creeping Frogfruit - *Phyla nodiflora*

## **OFFER SOLAR**

**Use solar energy panels and store energy in batteries for nighttime use.**

During Hurricane Matthew, residents were out of power for over a week. This was much shorter than DNR and Georgia Power's initial report that it would take 4-5 weeks to restore power, but still, power is a threat to island residents and on-island activity. While living on the island, I experienced several power outages. In March of 2021, a tree fell down on the south end of the island, disrupting the island's entire electrical grid late one night. When this happens, GA Power must travel by boat to the island to restore power. On the ferry ride the next morning, a Geechee resident shared that the Hog Hammock community and the South End/UGAMI/Reynolds mansion region of the island are actually on two different water systems. Power was out across the island and the Hog Hammock community did not even have water unless they had a well. This environmental injustice threatens the expansion of Geechee-led land reclamation and cultural preservation initiatives. Exploring low-cost solar farm solutions for Lot 1 and the Hog Hammock community can offer sustainability.

### ***DESIGN SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION -OPEN SPACE***

**Leave unplanned and undesigned areas for Geechee agency.** Often, public design is criticized for not including the interests of underrepresented communities. The plantation landscape also obviously offered no Black agency to shape the site’s design or experience. “Blackness is either absent, or only understood as outside of, rather than mutual to, the production of space” (McKittrick 2006, 11) Spending time with residents on the island and observing how Black growers are using their land reveals how Black people continue to claim agency over their space. If Lot 1 plans to be a space of racial healing, the site cannot be overplanned.



FIGURE 4.12: A woman taking a moment of rest to reflect on her experiences within Lot 1. Her friends walk over to join her. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 4.13: Plantation systems disrupted Black families and Black love for survival. In this experience of open space, a Black woman and man, perhaps lovers or perhaps newly acquainted, reflect with a picnic with a floating picnic blanket. Perhaps they have just attended a cooking class taught by descendants and are relaxing after the meal. Within this plantation future, they can laugh as loud as they would like and play music of their choice. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 4.14: View from hammock of tree vegetation. Users can set up their own personal hammocks wherever they would like within open space. Unlike the plantation, there are no limitations to the behaviors or views that can be experienced. Even in simple settings like such, users can find new meaning in a historically traumatic landscape. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.

### ***MEDICINAL HERB AND FLOWER CUT GARDEN***

**Include a culturally-relevant herb and flower cut garden** where people can gather to experience plants and exchange knowledge on their healing benefits.



FIGURE 4.15: Open, unpoliced space.



FIGURE 4.17: View of sunflower field. This area is also ideal for Instagrammable moments that can help redefine plantation futures. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.

**Incorporate a “Liberation beach”** with a view of live oaks (east of site) and First African Baptist church as a space of connectivity to the ancestors. This “beach” of sand and comfortable seating can offer open space to lay and hear the cane wrestle in the wind on a windy day. This space could also welcome Black writers, yogis, and creatives, for example, to the site for inspiration and/or retreats.

### ***MULTIGENERATIONAL PLAY***

***Experiment with Flying:*** Install swings on and near live oak trees. Many descendants expressed nostalgia for their past when asked about growing food and a swing experience may simulate a glimpse into the past-future. Late author Toni Morrison explores flying as a form of Black liberation (*Songs of Solomon*) and the tale of Flying

Africans at nearby St. Simons Island also engages in this method of escaping racism for Black joy. While no design can offer space for “flying”, swings create energy and can show site visitors a higher-level view and possibly a new appreciation for the site.

Visitors will be able to rest and reflect within the site.

- Wrap poles of swings with sweetgrass or Geechee fabrics
- Since descendants often play spades when they gather, Lot 1 should include a card table area within a screened-in porch and shade features.

**Offer site connectivity to nearby library programming** in the form of technical, agricultural, and science-based skills. These skills can be learned from descendants and visitors from nearby HBCU Savannah State University and the University of Georgia.

Kids can also become introduced to the site through simple activities such as water hoses and hiding spaces for kids to play in near and around agricultural spaces.

### ***INDIGO WALL***

- Allow for people to cool themselves off by spraying themselves with water from the wall
- Use stained glass to reflect what Mrs. Bailey describes as *dayclean*. Children are also a living reflection of *dayclean* and future generations. This wall can help reflect this theme near the site’s entry point.
- Invite Geechee descendants to contribute to the wall. A driving question could be:  
*What messages of hope and history do you want people to know?*

Wall should include mirrors, stained glass, water, quotes, seating, pull down drawerse boards, plexiglass, Bluetooth speaker, charger, close to peas, bars can be pulled down for relaxation and for eating and for processing. Compost bins should be

available near social gathering areas. Additionally, decorate compost and trash bins with Black artwork.

- Show transparent status of the project as part of the wall and include harvest success stories and goals for the public to view from the road.

### **REFRESH VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

**Create a volunteer station** for farm supplies and a tea/coffee rest station with Geechee books and goods for purchase. Currently, volunteers have nowhere to put their things or a place to rest and process Lot 1's connectivity to Sapelo Island's plantation history and future.

### **DESIGN SUGGESTIONS FOR NOURISHMENT**

#### ***PRIORITIZE LAND OWNERSHIP***

The largest constraint explicitly imposed upon (and expressed by) the Geechee descendants of Sapelo is land ownership. If land continues to be taken, cultural erasure is likely to follow as it has in other Geechee communities. This can be difficult for designers to accept because we would like for design to be the solution. Design of Lot 1 as a Third Space is a premature solution (Oldenburg 1991). Until early 2019, the on-island bar, known as the Trough, was the third place where locals gathered to socialize, eat, drink, and play cards. Outside of the Trough, particularly on Wednesdays, people also gathered at the nearby blue picnic tables underneath the trees for food and fellowship. Due to health complications experienced by the Trough's owner, the bar has been closed since then and there has not been another replacement where both locals and visitors gather.

Lot 1 could offer a third space, but residents expressed concerns of not owning or feeling connected to the lot. Additionally, tensions have risen between the UGA CWB Program and the partnering SICARS organization over the Lot's future. Transferring Lot 1 (and other state-owned

land) to the Geechee descendants through one of the following methods may be a solution:

***CREATE A BIPOC-LED LAND BANK SYSTEM***

Focus group and participant observations revealed that there is a growing interest from Black people to visit Sapelo and to support the efforts of Geechee descendants to save the land. Respondents from the focus group quickly raised over [\\$5000](#) in mutual aid in support of their Sapelo service trip in just one weekend. In cities with diasporic Geechee communities, such as Atlanta, Brunswick, Jacksonville, and Miami, there is also opportunity to engage BIPOC communities in financially saving Geechee land. For example, if and when a descendant is struggling to pay their property taxes, a blind notification can be sent via email/social media to BIPOC supporters who can pay the taxes and hold the land for descendants. When financially able, descendants can pay back the loan and maintain ownership of their [heirs property](#).

***IMPLEMENT A LAND JUSTICE TAX AS A FORM OF REPARATIONS***

According to Zillow, an acre on Sapelo currently costs over \$230,000, well over the land price of other lots within McIntosh County. The development of Sapelo could be slowed by instituting a tax on future land/property sales in the amount of 5%.

TABLE 4.7: A breakdown of property currently for sale (as of March 2021) and potential Justice Tax revenue. Data retrieved from Zillow.

Acreage	Selling Price
0.3	\$ 72,500.00
0.5	\$ 125,000.00
0.6	\$ 125,000.00
1	\$ 230,000.00
2.4	\$ 552,500.00
Cost per Acre	\$ 230,208.33
<i>Justice Tax</i>	\$ 0.05
<i>Potential Justice Tax Revenue</i>	\$ 11,510.42

These tax revenues can be put into a *Food and Cultural Sovereignty Plan* for the use of Geechee descendants. The funds can be managed by Geechee owned organizations, SICARS and SOLO with the support of the Gullah Geechee Nation and/or Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor for greater local and regional connectivity at Lot 1. Alternatively, the tax revenues can be evenly distributed to Geechee residents in the form of a one-time payment. If desired by Geechee descendants, a permanent sign can also be requested and put on display at the property. The sign would include information about the original Geechee owners of the land.

### ***ORGANIZE FAMILY LAND TRUSTS***

Given the existing tensions between different families on island, family land trusts may be a realistic option for reclaiming Lot 1 at an affordable rate that does not instigate property tax increases for Geechee residents. Additionally, establishing family land trusts on existing heirs' property will protect Geechee land from family wealth loss, partition sales, messy land transfers, and/or missing proof of will/formal estate complications. Even the USDA has recognized heirs' property as "the leading cause of Black involuntary land loss." In 2012, HB 744 Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act was enacted and does protect families, tenants-in-common from land removal and below fair market partition sales, but loopholes remain. Through family land trusts, Geechee descendants can officially begin to reclaim some of the land stolen from them by Spalding and Reynolds. Interested descendants of the larger Black Diaspora should also have the opportunity to purchase land at an affordable rate within a land trust agreement. This planning recommendation could lead to strengthened relationships between Geechee descendants and Black people elsewhere who share an interest in food, land, and cultural resistance to plantation economies.

### ***BAN PRIVATE BOAT DOCKS***

Implement a law that bans private, recreational boat docks on Sapelo Island. In June of 2020, a white vacation homeowner, James Watson, submitted a Revocable License Request for a personal boat dock over Garry Hole/Big Hole/Hammock Creek to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Coastal Department of Natural Resources. Descendants on and off island have shared that this is just "another attempt to turn Sapelo into the next Hilton Head Island." According to SICARS, this private dock, if built,

intrudes a sacred area where many descendants were baptized. These intrusive and racist requests from white vacation homeowners to claim more space forces descendants to constantly be on the defense of saving Sapelo from future development.

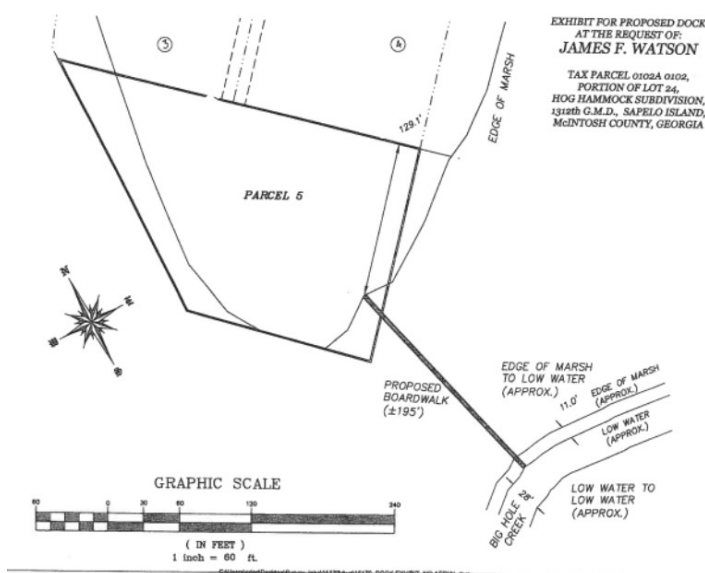


FIGURE 4.18: Map of proposed Private Dock.

Source: <http://www.sapeloislandga.org/projects/private-docks-campaign>

## ***INVEST IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY THROUGH A FARMERS***

### ***MARKETSTAND/TRUCK***

Build a farmers market stand that can be used by all Geechee residents and descendants for retail purposes and demonstrations (Black agency to self-organize). Given Lot 1's location, there is an opportunity to sell to people living/staying nearby and to those who may be traveling to/from Cabretta or the North End of the island. The market could also be in the form of an existing bus on the island and travel to residents and visitors. During the pandemic, Geechee

residents who work at the Reynolds

Mansion began selling takeout plates and if continued, this pop-up market could offer ingredients that cut down on ferry trips to the grocery store. People can also contribute to a Farm Stand Board with upcoming events, workshops, accomplishments, and jobs. This stand would be a continuation of the food justice efforts led by Davidson College students and help anchor Lot 1 as a destination. The stand/truck also provides opportunity for visitors to easily invest in the local economy. Sapelo still has a culture of taking care of elders so there should be a person who can make food deliveries to their homes.

### ***SELL DIASPORIC HERBS***

According to the 2020 Transparency Market Research study, the global organic herbal extracts market's value stood over US\$ 5.2 Bn and the market is expected to cross US\$ 8.4 Bn by 2030, at a CAGR of 4.8%. Given the CWB UGA, SOLO, and Geechee interests in driving revenue to the island, there is opportunity to save diasporic seeds *and* sell organic herbs. This could be done at Lot 1 or considering mistrust of the project, Geechee residents can also use the projections below to grow herbs and herbal products independently. The report also states that North America holds the largest share of 34.7% of the global organic herbal extracts market and there is no reason that Black growers should be left behind as seen through various food system inequities.

The revenue generated can support residents remaining on island and contribute to longer-term goals of Geechee Heritage tourism. Sapelo could sell its herbs directly to consumers or be a wholesaler, per request of co-director Bailey to some of the following herbal businesses:

- Ransom Naturals Ltd.

- Nature's Way Products, LLC
- Synergy Flavors
- Döhler
- Gaia Herbs
- Natrol, LLC
- Oregon's Wild Harvest
- Natural Factors Nutritional Products Ltd.
- Herb Pharm

TABLE 4.8: SAPELO PEA SALES PROJECTIONS BASED ON CURRENT AND POTENTIAL MARKET PRICING AND YIELD ESTIMATES

SAPELO PEA SALES PROJECTIONS					
<b>Yields (lbs/acre)</b>	<b>Market Price (per lb)</b>	<b>Sales Estimate (per acre)</b>	<b>.75 Acre</b>	<b>.50 Acre</b>	<b>.25 Acre</b>
1000	\$12.00	\$12,000.00	\$9,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$3,000.00
2000	\$12.00	\$24,000.00	\$18,000.00	\$12,000.00	\$6,000.00
<b>Yields (lbs/acre)</b>	<b>Market Price (per lb)</b>	<b>Sales Estimate (per acre)</b>	<b>.75 Acre</b>	<b>.50 Acre</b>	<b>.25 Acre</b>
1000	\$15.00	\$15,000.00	\$11,250.00	\$7,500.00	\$3,750.00
2000	\$15.00	\$30,000.00	\$22,500.00	\$15,000.00	\$7,500.00
Source: (“Crop Profile for Cowpeas in Georgia   UGA Cooperative Extension” n.d.)					

TABLE 4.9: MEDICINAL HERB AND SHRUB SALES PROJECTIONS

Medicinal Herbs and Shrubs	Scientific Name	Form	Low End of Retail price (per pound)	High End of Retail price (per pound)	Yield (dry lbs)	Plot size (acre)	Moisture Ratio	Low End Sales Projection (per 1/8 acre)	High End Sales Projections (per 1/8 acre)
Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	Dried leaves	\$9.50	\$24.00	100	1/8	3:1	\$950.00	\$2,400.00
Holy Basil	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i>	Dried/fresh leaves	\$11.00	\$30.00	300	1/8	4:1	\$3,300.00	\$9,000.00
St. John's Wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	Dried/fresh leaves	\$9.00	\$28.00	100	1/8	4:1	\$900.00	\$2,800.00
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Dried	\$33.00	\$51.00	200	1/8	4:1	\$6,600.00	\$10,200.00

Peppermint	<i>Mentha piperita</i>	Dried	\$10.00	\$22.00	200	1/8	5:1	\$2,000.00	\$4,400.00
Motherwort	<i>Leonurus cardiaca</i>	Dried	9	24	150	1/8	4:1	\$1,350.00	\$3,600.00
Lemon balm	<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	Dried	11	25	200	1/8	5:1	\$2,200.00	\$5,000.00
Garlic	<i>Allium spp.</i>	Dried and cured	8	20	375	1/8	n/a	\$3,000.00	\$7,500.00
Echinacea	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Fresh tops	6	13	400	1/8	4:1	\$2,400.00	\$5,200.00
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	Dried	21	40	230	1/8	5:1	\$4,830.00	\$9,200.00
Life Everlasting	<i>Helichrysum stoechas</i>	Dried	10	50	Unkno wn	1/8			

Mullein	<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Dried	10	50	380	1/8	n/a	\$3,800.00	\$19,000.00
Beautyberry	<i>Callicarpa americana</i>	Dried	10	30	.5 lb/per plant	Unkno wn			
Yaupon Holly	<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	Dried	20	50	Unkno wn				
Source: (Carpenter and Carpenter 2015)									

## LEVERAGE LODGING POTENTIAL

- Implement a Geechee resident idea (shared during interviews) for eco-tourism: Use the school buses for guest lodging with a gathering area in between.
- Implement wayfinding to and at Lot 1; include string lights (as suggested by residents)
- Name each guesthouse, guest room, or lodging facility after a family on the island. This may help create a sense of belonging at Lot 1. Give families the option of splitting profit of rental in exchange for maintenance support
- Add *Les Jardin lakous* (inspired by Soul Fire Farm and Haitian practice) around a treehouse/deer stand structure, open-air with fans and screens to keep away sand gnats

## PROMOTE SKILLS EXCHANGE

Most residents shared that they are used to building structures, hunting, fishing, and farming themselves. This skill of self-sufficiency and Black sovereignty that, if desired, can be monetized as part of an immersive tour package. Plantation landscapes subjected Black bodies to certain tasks, distanced Black people from place-based culture, and devalued diasporic agricultural expertise. Because of Sapelo's remote location, descendants continue to resist this notion and pride themselves on being resourceful despite racist efforts to displace these place-based skills. Visitors can pay for a skills-building workshop led by interested descendants. Additionally, with more investor capital and grant funding, Lot 1 could include an outdoor kitchen (with refrigeration) that is big enough to host community-led workshops with visiting BIPOC chefs and food enthusiasts. Visitors can also apply to host a skills-

building workshop in partnership with the local Hog Hammock Library. Per the request of residents, workshops could include topics such as grant writing, heirs property, land trusts, cooking, and entrepreneurship. Through these community-building workshops, diverse Black people can name and grieve racism, and find new ways to build anti-racist futures.



FIGURE 4.19: Potential Lodging at Lot 1. At the request of M. Bailey (Co-director of CWB UGA), this design incorporates repurposed Sapelo buses (that are already on island) for lodging. Between the buses, users can participate in activities such as yoga and shade (teal covering east of bus) that reclaim Black bodies. Deliberate use of color, shade, and music also help create an enjoyable experience that can be co-designed by users. The bus also includes Save Our Land Ourselves (SOLO). Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 4.20: A woman decides that she has had enough of the communal space and walks to a place of solitude. Design and rendering by Whitney Barr.



FIGURE 4.21: Open space for biking amidst the lot's vegetation. Life everlasting is planted within the foreground for ease of harvesting during the fall.

Observations, site inventory, and interviews helped develop an array of design scenarios and potential racial healing experiences. These design scenarios can be implemented at Lot 1, other places on Sapelo, or outside of the island.

# Loosening racism's grip on former plantations

A racial healing design framework by Whitney Barr

**(RE)LEARN**



(via) Diasporic crops  
and  
medicinal herbs

**UNLEARN**



Eurocentric history  
of Sapelo Island

Land/agriculture=bad

Extractive colonialism  
of land

**REFLECT**



African Diasporic  
relationships with land

Gullah Geechee/  
Sapelo memories

**NOURISH**



Community building  
on/off island

Mind + body refuel

Wealth building  
(beyond survival)

Healing [hee-ling]

**Adjective**

*Soothing, comforting, restoring*

**Noun**

*the process of becoming well (again) or growing sound*

**Transitive verb**

*To ease or relieve emotional distress*

*To mend*

**intransitive verb**

*To become free from injury or disease*

*To cause (an undesirable condition) to be overcome*

“They weren't just growing stuff—they were cultivating resistance.” Food historian  
and chef Michael Twitty

**CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSION, REFLECTIONS, AND LIMITATIONS**

This investigation of diasporic crop landscapes is only the beginning of exploring how landscape designers can physically respond to racially healing within plantation futures. This ongoing reclamation of antiracist, edible landscapes requires more Black designers, racially inclusive graphics, and more transdisciplinary agrifood-design scholarship.

There is a growing base of researchers investigating the intersection of food, race, and space, and BIPOC landscape designers and planners have the professional and lived experiences to authentically help visualize these critiques. Non-BIPOC designers can offer support through funding, inclusive design practices (including design ethnography), and advocacy, for example.

There is a dire need for more racially inclusive graphics of people and foodways to reflect realistic and reimagined plantation futures. Within existing 3D rendering software, the number of Black men and women is limited (Black children are almost nonexistent) and when available, they are dressed in business attire or athletic attire. From my search, none of them appeared particularly joyful or prepared to immerse into an agricultural landscape. Some Black designers shared with me that they resist this violent normalization of “Black placelessness” by creating their own entourages with people they know (McKittrick 2006). An expansion of graphics is an act of design justice to communicate racial healing experiences such as Black joy, love, freedom, imagination, sisterhood, brotherhood, and solidarity.

Additionally, traditional landscape design site plans and sections can sanitize the racial healing experiences of “Black food geographies” (Reese 2019; Reese & Garth 2021). This ethnographic experience educated me on how a small Black community holds on tightly to their land and its foodways. In response to the overarching research question, diasporic crop landscapes are desired and can contribute to a physical response of plantation futures. While this project began with an examination of the plantation and specific African diasporic crops, it quickly became evident that any design suggestions would be naive and premature without Geechee land ownership. Thus, the methods selected were transdisciplinary and the suggestions reflected their varied interests in specific crops and Sapelo’s future. When possible, attempts were made to incorporate spaces of racial healing, but the effectiveness of these suggestions would need to be seen within physical space over time. Sapelo and other Black communities do not have to be landscapes of “persistent Black poverty” and perhaps if plantation future design scenarios can effectively help support this land paradigm shift within a small, remote community, they can be thoughtfully applied in other anti-Black landscapes.

## REFLECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This extensive choice of methods deepened my understanding of the landscape and its possible physical design responses to racial healing via (re)learning, unlearning, reflecting, and nourishing. These four themes not only guided my methodical approach, but also helped prioritize site-specific ways for potential users to (re)learn, unlearn, reflect, and nourish their racial identities in connection to the Geechee and larger West African Diaspora. By engaging in personal reflexivity and immersing into Sapelo's lived and written Geechee history and cultural values, there does appear to be space for a healing landscape. While some findings did not directly influence the final design scenarios, the triangulation of the data allowed for thoughtful options (rather than generic design suggestions). The process itself was healing [hee-ling] because I discovered ways to make the landscape itself well (again) and based on participant responses, growing diasporic crops was a way of mending emotional distress to former plantation landscapes.

Open-ended questions and ethnographic methodologies are criticized for their looseness in structure and theoretical framework. In response, I spent over a year doing fieldwork at Lot alongside local and visiting volunteers and designed my own test plot of diasporic crops before even considering a research scope. People began to ask me what I was doing on the island and in most cases, I received confused, yet smiling responses. Black people questioned my rationale and desire to return to the land and, at the same time, expressed a keen interest in going to this place that felt so *foreign and familiar* at the same time.

This thesis also accepted **Black placekeeping** as living, diverse, joyful, changing, and painful at times. Plainly, placekeeping, “the active care and maintenance of a place and its socio-cultural fabric by the people who live and work there” and reimagining [plantation]

futures must be done *with* not *for* Black people (Creative Placekeeping Citizen Artist Salon - Action Network ). There is no comprehensive toolkit for doing this racial design work, so I intellectually improvised as I went along, allowed myself to make mistakes, fact-checked with Geechee descendants, and consulted with Black designers for guidance throughout this qualitative researcher-designer study.

Early into the project, there was a conflict between the open-ended nature of participant observation and interview questions related to racial healing and the positivist, more scientific approach of mining existing sites, texts, archives, and photos for relevant diasporic crops. I wanted to ask every Geechee descendant on the island what they thought about the agricultural project and what they wanted to see grown and developed for Lot 1's plantation future. It sounded great in theory, but as I thought back to my first day on the island and the pushback from community members, I decided against this. The most important rule of ethnographic research is to do no harm. Though I wanted to bring in as many voices as possible in context with this site's potential future as a place of racial healing, the death of Mrs. Bailey, pending land lawsuits with the state of Georgia, recent storms (Hurricane Irma and Matthew), and an unfinished Cultural Village plan for the same site where the sugarcane was now growing made extensive interviewing *anything but healing* to this community. Additionally, the political nature of the project with UGA and Clemson as partners rightfully bothered some residents who want SICARS to be the sole manager on Geechee-owned land. When I joined this effort, functional decisions about the five lots were already being made so I found it worthwhile to pause my research, participate as an activist for the program, and then after exploration, define an actual challenge that landscape architecture may help solve. Even now as I write this thesis, I continue to wrestle with racial healing and Black liberation on land that is albeit

Heritage Preserve Land for cultural purposes only but still owned by the state of Georgia. For this reason, the thesis offers site-specific and crop-specific suggestions that may also be applied elsewhere. Also, findings from living on the island quickly revealed that design is not the sole or even initial solution for reclaiming Geechee land, including plantations. For the sake of my academic requirements, I remixed traditional landscape architecture methods of understanding a landscape *and* centered Black foodways.

With a longer timeline and a COVID- free environment, I would have included focus groups with both on-island and off-island descendants for more conceptual design development. I also would have traveled to Black-owned farms to learn more about their crops firsthand and where available, about their social program items related to racial healing.

Colonialism successfully replicated the plantation landscape throughout the world by attempting to disorient African Diasporas into a monolith of enslaved Black bodies void of joy, culture, or intellect. Within this landscape, Black people sought out spaces of refuge- the woods, the home, and small gatherings, for example, in order to cope and to feel whole. Today, Black people continue to live in this double consciousness of “looking

at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (Du Bois 1903). I experienced this in the studio environment and throughout this thesis project as I attempted to find ways to bring my whole self into my work while also being able to find Black joy in both existing and reimagined spaces. I found that I had to confront the previous use of sites and to remember that when design texts mentioned "we", they were not talking about a Black woman. While trained to "make a place" through design, I struggle with whether there is a need to orchestrate experiences-especially on Sapelo. Also, there is so much tension about the use of Lot 1 so it is possible that the design ideas may not be realized. Still, this thesis proved that there are ways to use diasporic crops as a response to plantation futures. But the barriers of land ownership exceed the scope of any design potential of plantation futures. Designers can help communities such as Sapelo, protect and plan for land ownership within these plantation futures.

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